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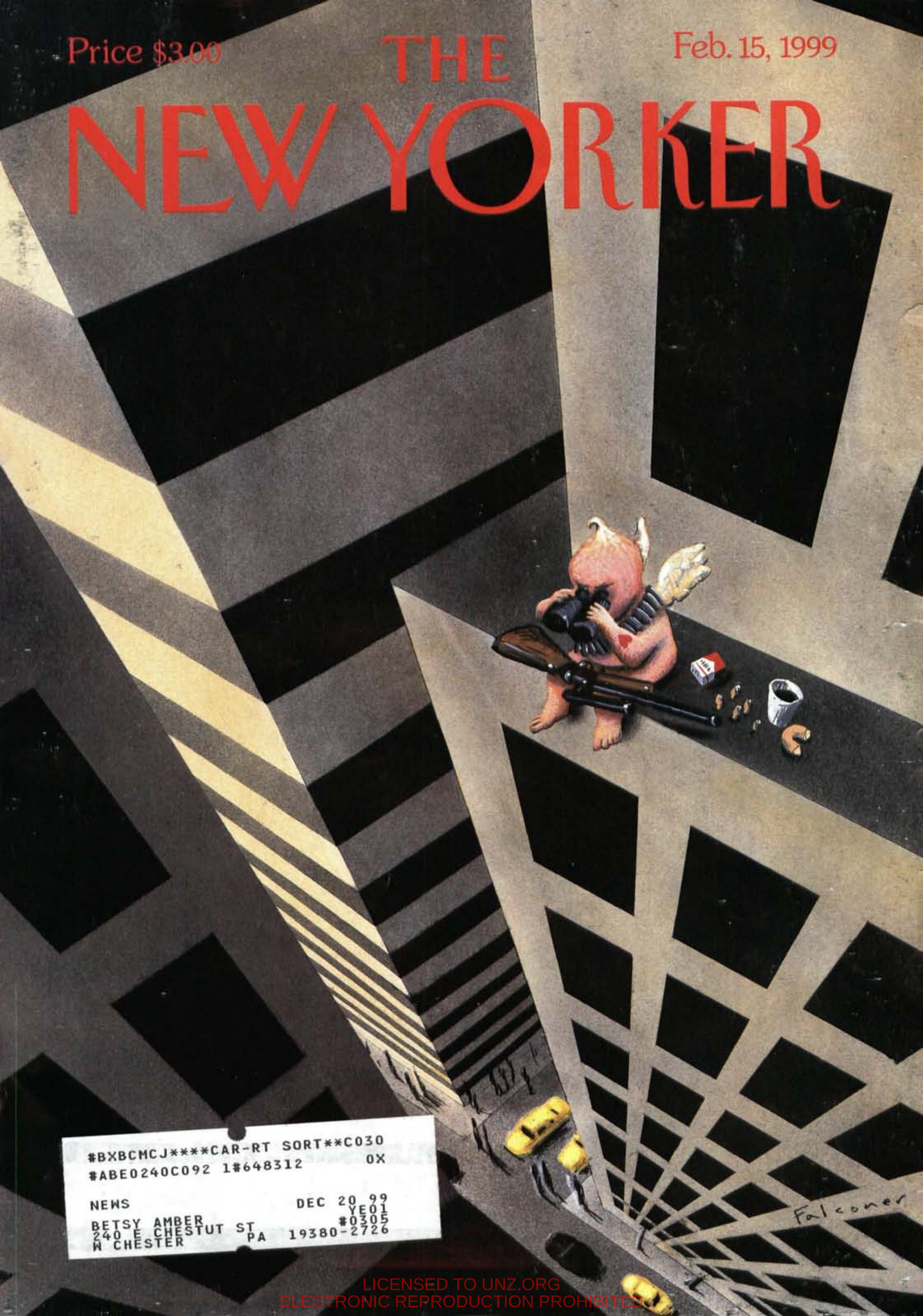

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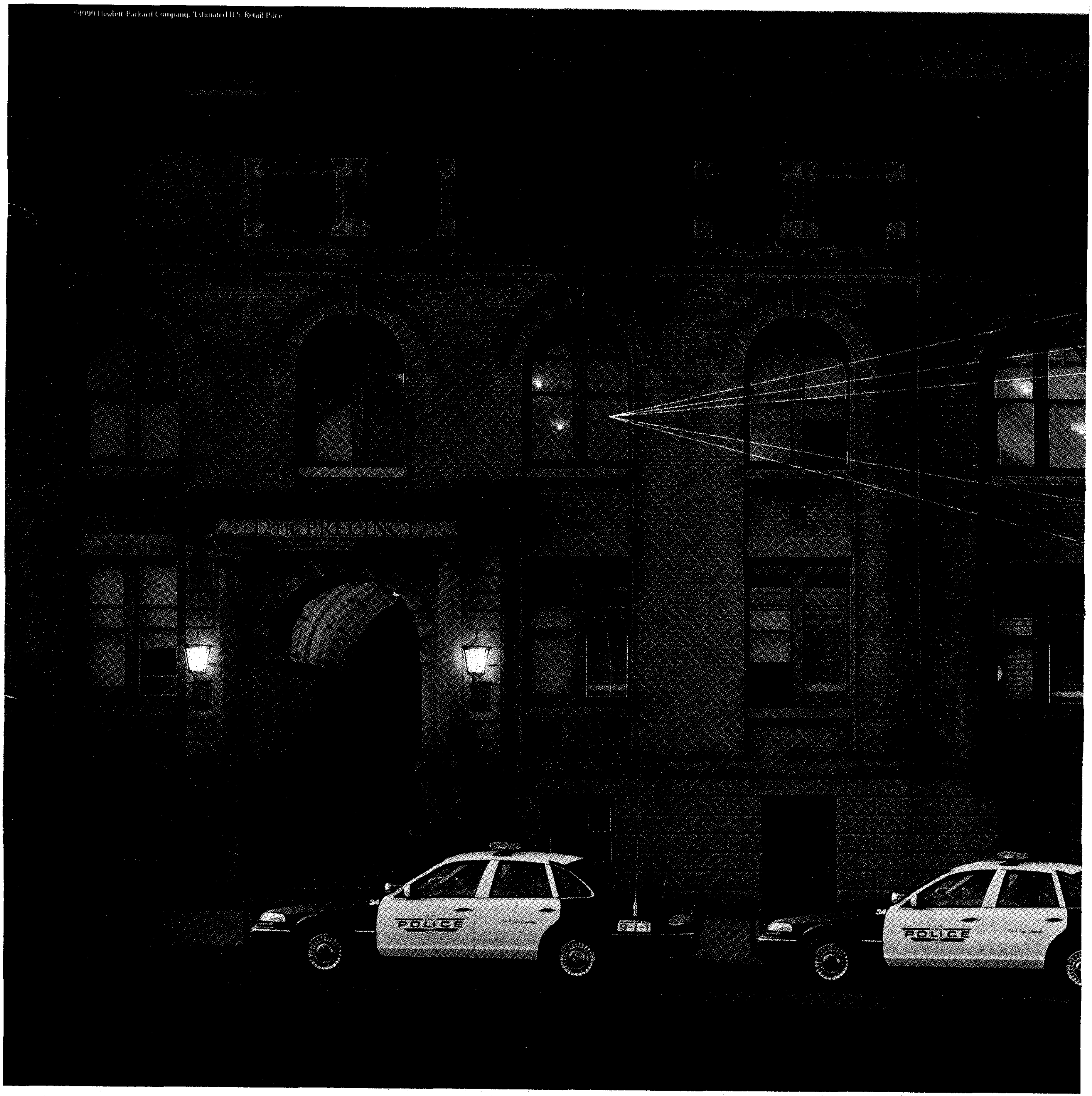

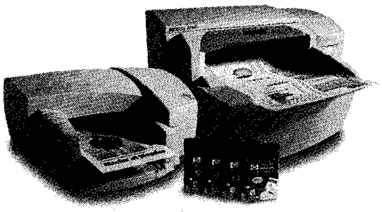

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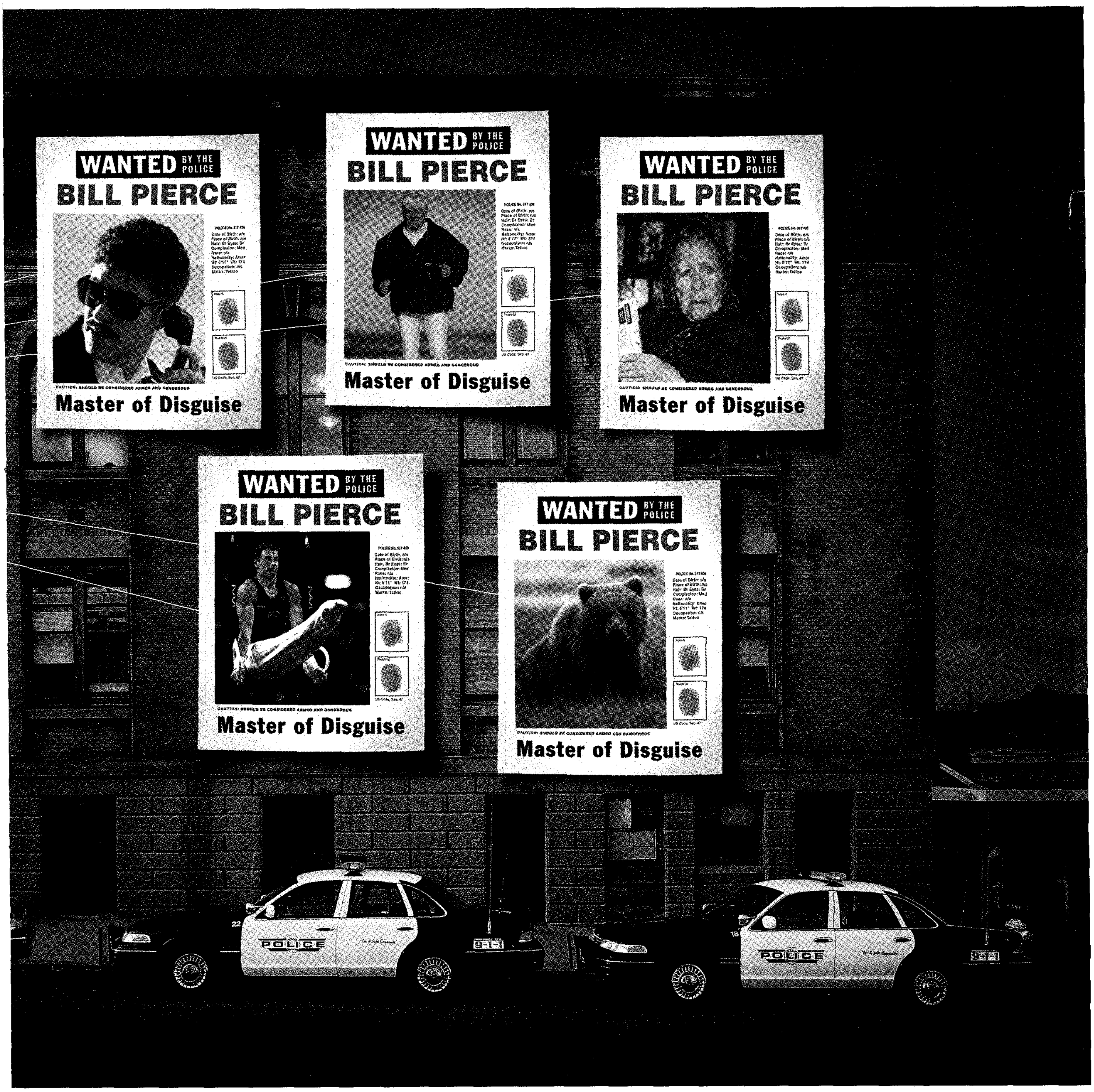
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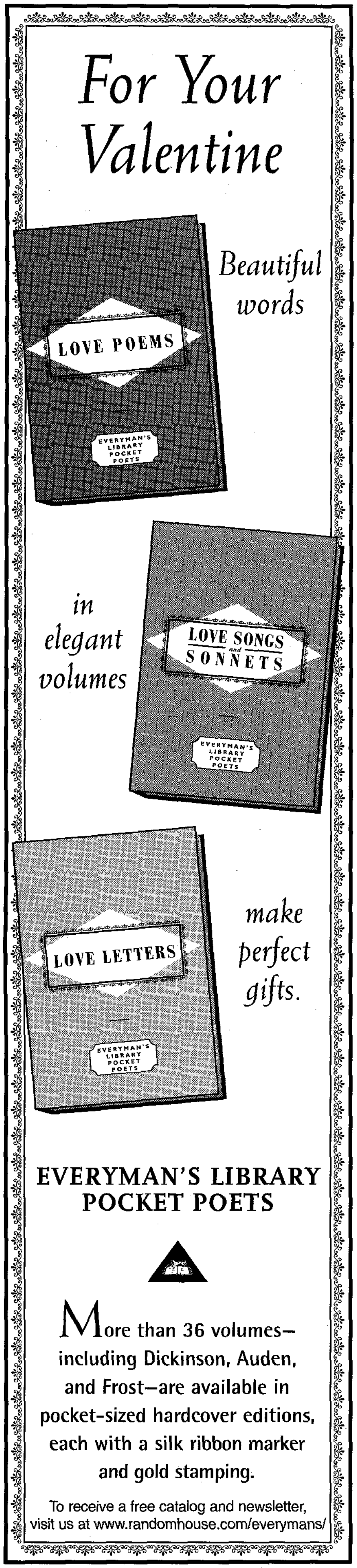
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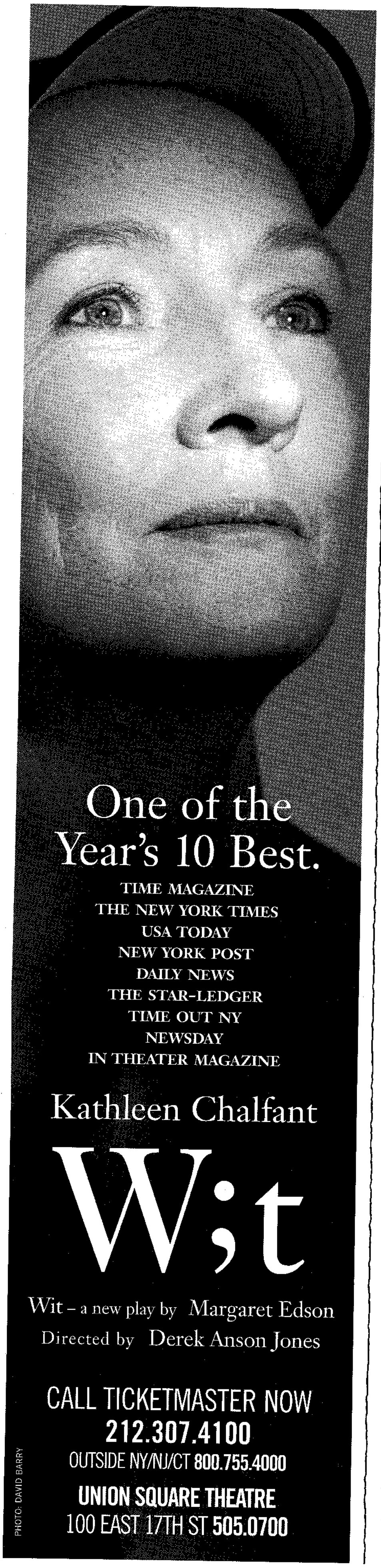
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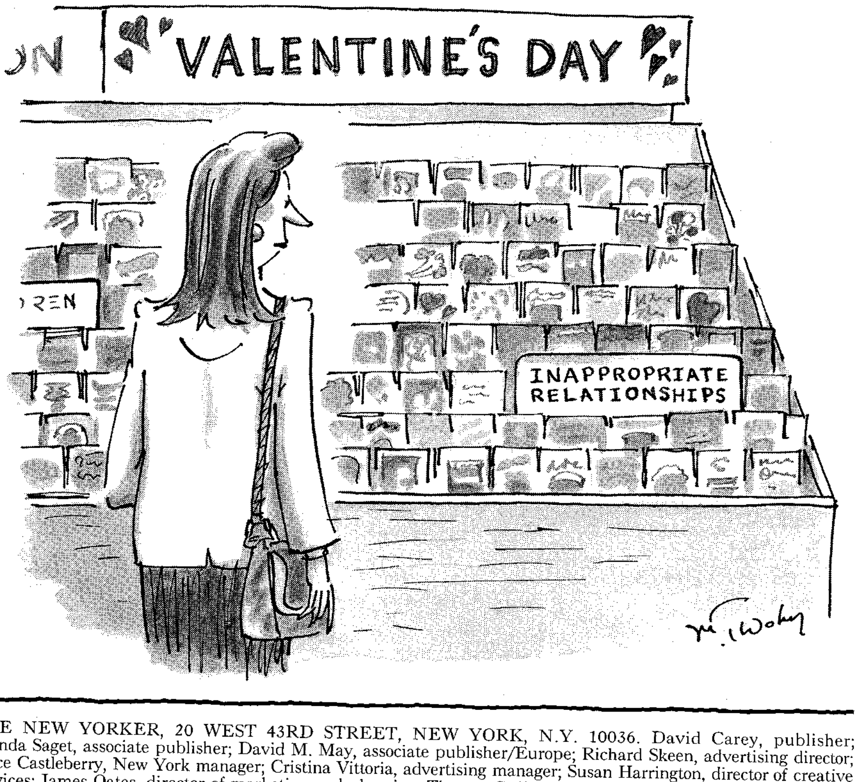

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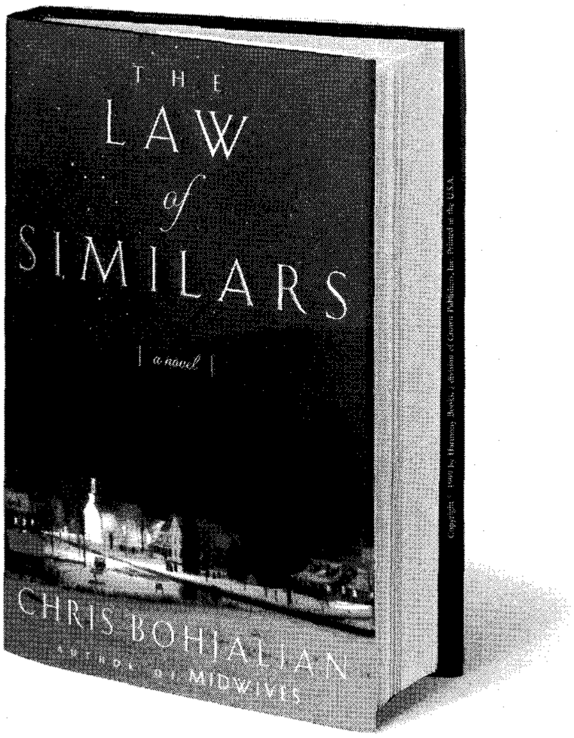

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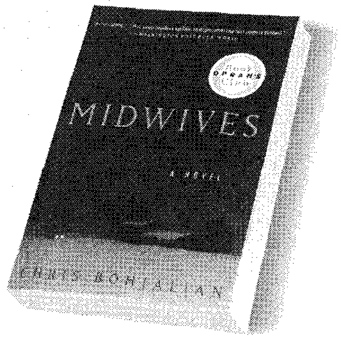

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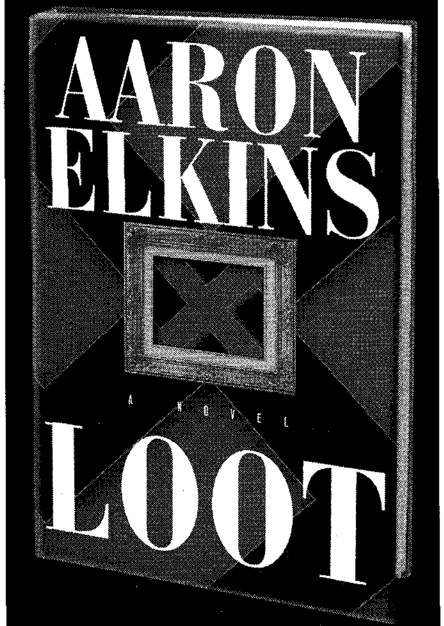

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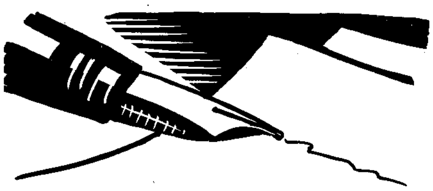

A CHICKEN IN EVERY POT

Adam Gopnik summarizes George Lang's vision of "rebuilding the old Hungarian middle-class culture from the top down" with the conceit of "the roast duck coming first, and the middle class calling itself into existence in order to eat it" ("Restaurant at the Zoo," January 11th). This recalls Marie Antoinette in one of her less pithy moments. The greatest danger to a civil society in Hungary (indeed, throughout Eastern Europe) is the rapidly widening gap between a super-rich entrepreneurial class—Lang's clientele at the newly renovated Gundel—and the masses of former middle- or working-class people reduced to poverty by the dynamics of free enterprise. Lang's Gundel, with its new, lower-priced café attached, exemplifies the problem. My father, who has lived in Budapest all his life, pointed out to me recently that, while restaurants such as Gundel were always relatively expensive in Hungary, they were not beyond the reach of a comfortable middle class (even if only for special occasions). Today, a Hungarian tailor (such as George Lang's father, who once took his son to dine at Gundel, was) could not even think of eating at the main restaurant short of taking out a second mortgage on his house—which he isn't likely to own anyway. Indeed, even the lamentably numerous McDonald's restaurants in Budapest end up catering to yuppies, wages and prices being what they are, rather than to their traditional working-class clientele.

ANDRÉ BALOG
New York City

LOIS'S WEB

All I would add to Malcolm Gladwell's "Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg" (January 11th), about the societal power of acquaintanceship, is that the now ubiquitous Internet also uses the connective structure so clearly explained in the article: many small computers are connected to a larger server, which is connected to other, similar servers, which are, in turn, connected to many other small computers. This structure not only provides reliability through redundant links, but it shortens the path over which information must flow in just the same way as do the networks of people whom Gladwell describes.

STEWART A. DENENBERG
Plattsburgh, N.Y.

Within a day of reading "Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg," my husband and I discovered that his boss, an environmental lawyer, used to work with Lois and that my mother knows Lois from arts-in-education conferences. Then I happened to overhear two coworkers of mine at a theatre company saying that they had to call "Lois." When I interrupted to ask, with disbelief, if they meant Lois Weisberg, they replied with puzzled glances, "Of course."

JULIEANNE EHRE
Chicago, Ill.

ORGANIC ART LOVERS

In his review of the new Duane Hanson retrospective ("Stilled Lives," January 11th) Peter Schjeldahl writes of his reaction to the sculptures, "I knew that Hanson's lower-class types had to be objets d'art, because their real-life counterparts do not visit fancy museums." Having attended a Hanson show at Florida State University, that wasn't the reaction I'd expected. In Florida, the sculptures looked a lot like those who looked at them. I had entered the gallery not much impressed by what seemed Hanson's unedifying and unnecessary realism. By the end, I was suspicious of the reality of the punch server, the hostess, the guard, and the other art lovers. (Most proved organic; the guard was not.) I left with the nature of my own reality significantly dislocated.

JANET BURROWAY
Tallahassee, Fla.

•

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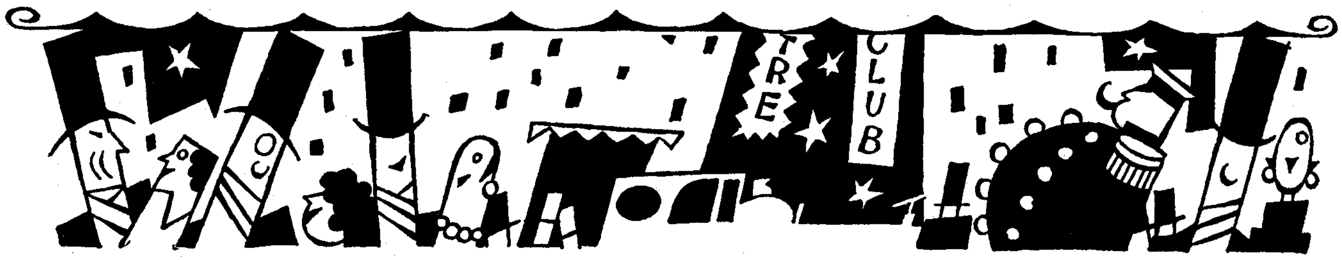

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Annie Get Your Gun—Bernadette Peters stars as the sharpshooter Annie Oakley, in Irving Berlin's 1946 musical. Directed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Babes in Arms—City Center's Encores! series kicks off its sixth season with a concert staging of Rodgers and Hart's 1937 musical. Feb. 11-12 at 8, Feb. 13 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 14 at 6:30. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Beautiful Thing—Jonathan Harvey's 1993 drama, set in London, about two working-class boys who fall in love. In previews through Feb. 13. Opens Feb. 14 at 7. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Bright Lights, Big City—A musical version of the Jay McInerney novel, with a book, music, and lyrics by Paul Scott Goodman. Michael Greif ("Rent") is the director. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 780-9037.)

Captains Courageous: The Musical—Manhattan Theatre Club presents Treat Williams and Brandon Espinoza in a tuneful version of Kipling's novel. With music by Frederick Freyer and book and lyrics by Patrick Cook. In previews through Feb. 14. Opens Feb. 16 at 8. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Cleveland—Performances of the Flea Theatre's revival of Mac Wellman's 1986 play, which opens Feb. 12 at 10, will run in repertory with their contemporary staging of "Benten Kozo," by Kawatake Mokuami. (41 White St. 226-0051.)

The Hothouse—An early Pinter comedy, in an Atlantic Theatre Company production directed by Karen Kohlhaas. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

The Mineola Twins—In Paula Vogel's dark comedy, Swoosie Kurtz portrays both a good sister and her evil twin. Directed by Joe Mantello. In previews. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9300.)

The Misanthrope—Martin Crimp's new version of Molière's comedy, starring Uma Thurman and Roger Rees, is set in present-day London. In previews through Feb. 13. Opens Feb. 14 at 7. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200.)

Night Must Fall—Matthew Broderick portrays a psychopath, in a National Actors Theatre revival of Emlyn Williams's 1935 thriller, directed by John Tillinger. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Not About Nightingales—Tennessee Williams's recently rediscovered early play, inspired by a 1938 prison uprising, is directed by Trevor Nunn. Previews begin Feb. 13. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Ashes to Ashes—The Roundabout Theatre Company's staging of Harold Pinter's new play, directed by Karel Reisz, stars Lindsay Duncan and David Strathairn. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Blue Heart—The brilliant British playwright Caryl Churchill is known for taking the world apart and putting it back together in such odd and fantastic ways that it makes the audience wonder which is truly stranger—reality or her alternative. In the case of this set of short plays, however, you stop wondering early on. Once her devices for making the world strange are in place, not much is surprising, which is the biggest surprise of all for Churchill. Both plays are enjoyable nonetheless, and the cast is wonderful. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Closes Feb. 21.)

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The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job, and she and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, but it takes all of their charisma to give an iota of life to this show's cardboard characters and charmless script—an adaptation by David Hare of Arthur Schnitzler's Viennese sexual merry-go-round, "La Ronde." (Reviewed in our issue of 12/28/98 & 1/4/99.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Death of a Salesman—From Chicago's Goodman Theatre, a fiftieth-anniversary staging of Arthur Miller's play. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Electra—David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' tragedy, starring Zoë Wanamaker. The play's bewildering brutality comes through as clearly as yesterday's headlines. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Eros Trilogy—Betty Buckley, T. Scott Cunningham, and Zak Orth star in three short works by Nicky Silver, centered on the mother-and-son relationship. David Warren is the director. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

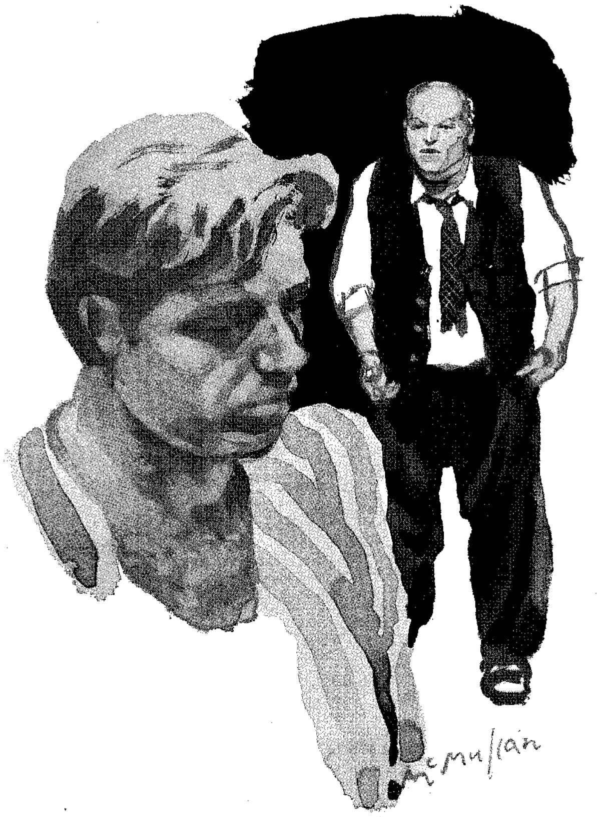
Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Fosse—A tribute to the choreographer's work, created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

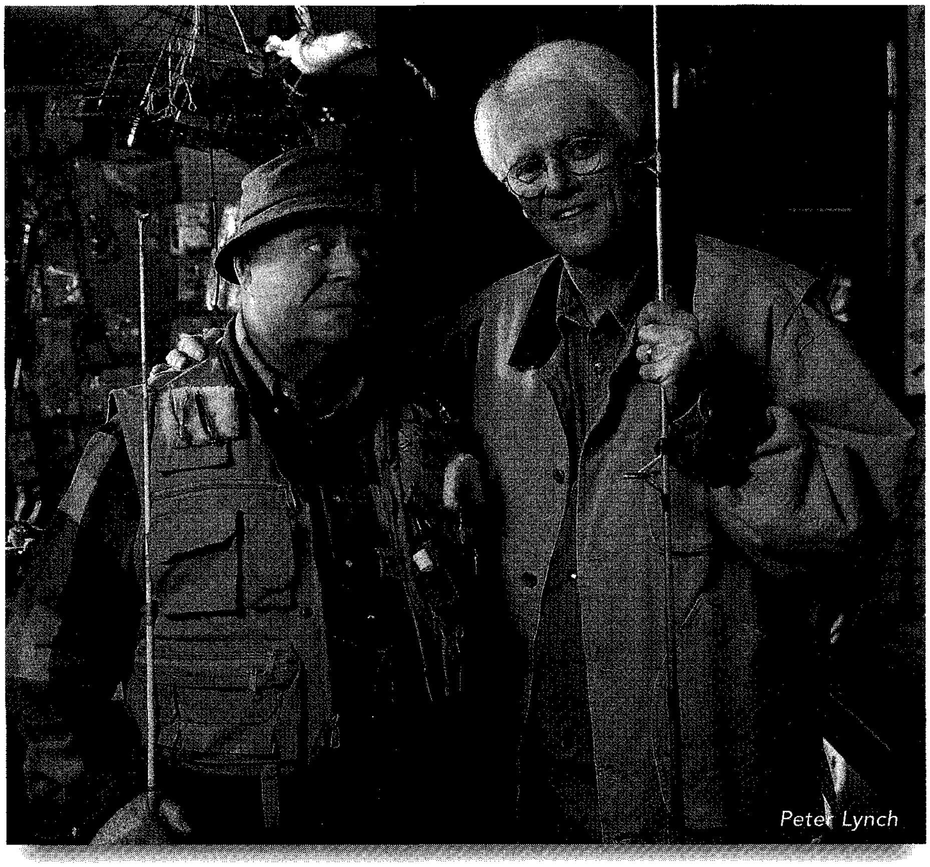
High Life—Four morphine-blitzed crooks plot a bank heist, in a black comedy by first-time playwright Lee MacDougall. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes Feb. 14.)

House/Lights—Gertrude Stein's libretto for the opera "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" and the 1964 cult film "Olga's House of Shame" are the inspirations for the Wooster Group's latest work. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

The Iphigenia Cycle—JoAnne Akalaitis's new production of Euripides' "Iphigenia at Aulis" and "Iphigenia in Tauris" gives us the child as the teen-ager she would have been—euphorically self-dramatizing one moment, pouty and put-upon the next—and it is a brilliant stroke, well acted by Anne Dudek. The rest of the evening, however, is bafflingly uneven, with, for instance, Agamemnon's torment wrenchingly conveyed by Jack Willis, while the madness of Orestes (Taylor Price) consists of some annoying tics and is often played for humor; similarly, the imagery includes the shocking sight of the bloody steps of the temple in Tauris as well as the chorus performing faux-modern dance and speaking into standing microphones to no apparent purpose. Though the production clearly focusses on the notion of power through the



Kevin Anderson and Brian Dennehy, in "Death of a Salesman."



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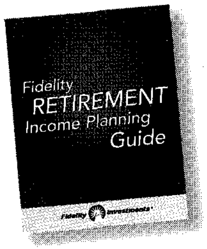

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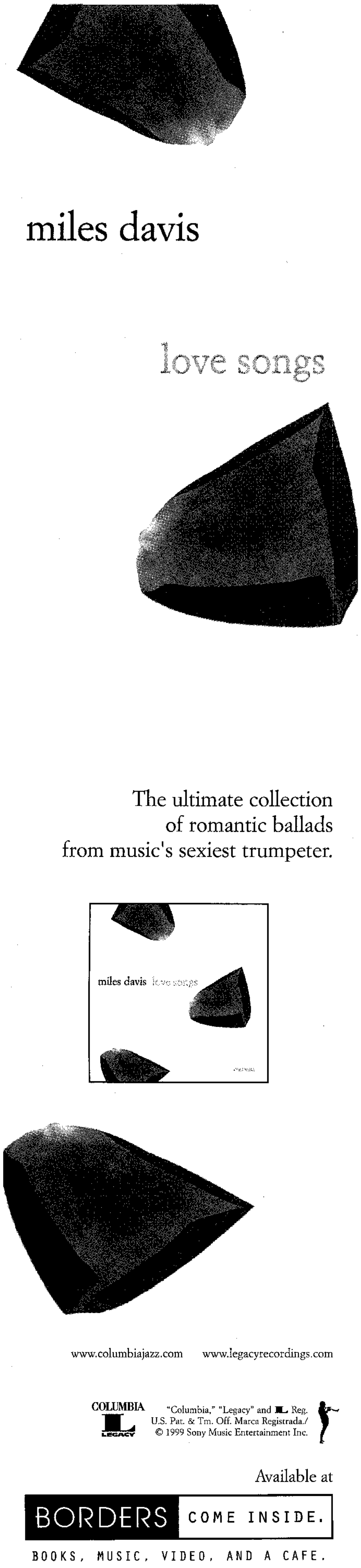
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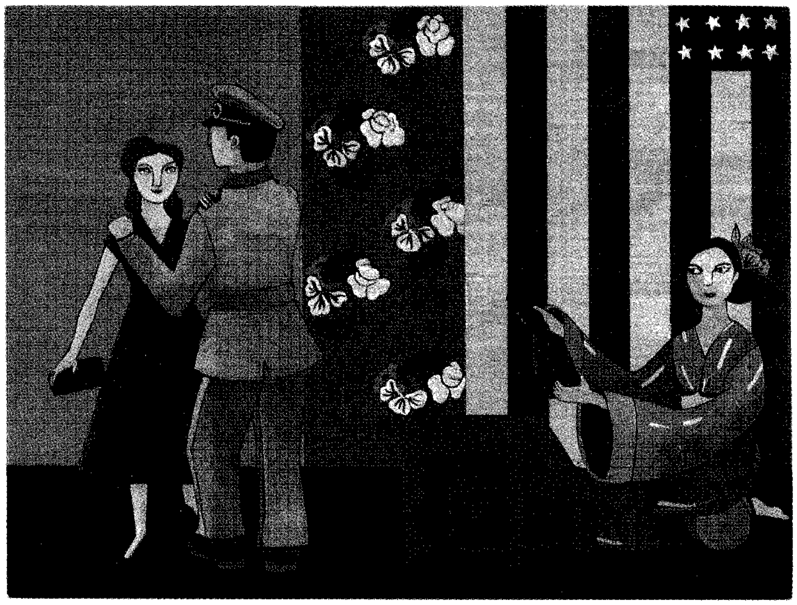
ages—the power of celebrity, fear, love, and self-delusion—it's more a jumble than a revelation. Presented by Theatre for a New Audience. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes Feb. 14.)

JAMES NAUGHTON: STREET OF DREAMS—Mr. Naughton sings a selection of twenty romantic tunes, accompanied by a quintet under the direction of John Oddo. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

KILLER JOE—In Tracy Letts's graphically violent dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. The terrific production is so vividly unself-conscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

LITTLE BY LITTLE—Liz Larsen, Christiane Noll, and Darrin Baker portray childhood friends who become involved in a love triangle as adults, in a new musical from the York Theatre Company. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Feb. 21.)

A MAJORITY OF ONE—A Jewish widow (Phyllis Newman) falls in love with a retired Japanese businessman (Randall Duk Kim), in Leonard Spigelgass's 1959 comedy. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000. Closes Feb. 14.)



Lisa Emery, Michael Hayden, and Sonnie Brown, in "Far East."

THE MOST FABULOUS STORY EVER TOLD—Paul Rudnick's new version of a very old tale, starring Alan Tudyk and Jay Goede as Adam and Steve and Becky Ann Baker and Kathryn Meisle as Jane and Mable. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. But drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is an artifact of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

PARADE—This musical revisits the case of Leo Frank, a college-educated Northern Jew who in 1913 was accused of murdering a teen-age girl in the Atlanta pencil factory that he managed, only to be taken from jail in 1915 by anti-Semitic vigilantes and lynched. It is generally believed that Frank was railroaded, and the show feels like a train hauling a heavy cargo of exposition uphill to a preset destination. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

PARADISE HOTEL—A new mind bender from the director and writer Richard Foreman, about a group of travellers searching for sexual nirvana. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

SHANGHAI MOON—Another movie spoof from the pen of Charles Busch, who stars as the wife of a British diplomat in nineteen-thirties China. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes Feb. 14.)

SIDE MAN—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play, expertly directed by Michael Mayer, is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

STOP KISS—Diana Son's modern tragicomedy, about two heretofore heterosexual young women (Brooke Smith and Sandra Oh) falling in love in New York, is a small wonder. The fine production shifts back and forth seamlessly between scenes that lead up to the friends' first kiss and scenes that follow it, in the aftermath of a brutal, bias-inspired assault. It's a sweet dream and a nightmare at once, a juxtaposition that makes both sides of life more resonant. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Feb. 21.)

THIS IS OUR YOUTH—Kenneth Lonergan's highly praised comedy about postadolescent heartbreak has reopened at a new theatre. His characters are meant to be the by-products of a morally bankrupt culture; they have everything in life but a reason to be. Lonergan, whose script shows real theatrical promise, is good on surface behavior but not on subtext. Everything that is psychologically important happens offstage. (Douglas Fairbanks, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

WANG DANG—Tom Noonan wrote, directed, and stars in a play about a has-been filmmaker guest-lecturing at a small college. (Paradise Theatre, 64 E. 4th St. 253-8107. Closes Feb. 14.)

WIT—In this first play by Margaret Edson, about the life and death (from ovarian cancer) of a John Donne scholar, Kathleen Chalfant gives an excruciating, powerful performance as Dr. Vivian Bearing, one of those larger-than-life professors who are terrifyingly smart, and proud of it. Dressed in a hospital gown and pushing an I.V. pole, Bearing plays games with words, which are giddily, awfully, hilarious (they are, in fact, the essence of wit); but word games will not save her, and she knows it. Right up to the last second, "Wit" has riches of acting, writing, and stagecraft that you revel in, even in the atmosphere of death, and it is directed with just the right touch by Derek Anson Jones. (1/18/99) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN—Clark Gesner's 1967 musical based on the Charles Schulz comic strip, directed by Michael Mayer. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **COLLECTED STORIES:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE SOUND OF MUSIC:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Feb. 10 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Stabat Mater," and "Vienna Waltzes." . . ¶ Feb. 11 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Vienna Waltzes." . . ¶ Feb. 12 at 8: "Reliquary," "Romeo and Juliet," "Bugaku," and "Ancient Airs and Dances." . . ¶ Feb. 13 at 2: "Concerto Barocco," "Beethoven Romance," "The Four Temperaments," and "Chaconne." . . ¶ Feb. 13 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Chaconne." . . ¶ Feb. 14 at 3: "Divertimento No. 15," "Reliquary," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Concerti Armonici." . . ¶ Feb. 16 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Vienna Waltzes." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through Feb. 28.)

Martha Graham Dance Company—In its first extended New York season in five years, the thirty-member company, under the direction of Ron Protas, presents fifteen repertory works (including "Appalachian Spring," "Night Journey," and "Errand Into the Maze") and two homages ("Duets for Martha," with contributions from Maurice Béjart, Twyla Tharp, Robert Wilson, and Lucinda Childs, and "But Not for Me: Gershwin Graham," choreographed by Susan Stroman). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 9-12 and Feb. 16 at 8, Feb. 13 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 14 at 2 and 7:30. Through Feb. 21.)

Carnival—Dance Theatre Workshop continues its two-month-long series designed to give extended exposure to emerging companies. Feb. 9-10 at 8: **PAT HALL & PAM PATRICK** in "(under)Cover Girls." Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ Feb. 11-12 at 8: **PHILIP HAMILTON** in "Vocalscapes." Through Feb. 21. . . . ¶ Feb. 13 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 3: **WALLY CARDONA QUARTET** in "Open House 01." (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. The festival continues through March 28.)

Kabuki Dance—Nakamura Shijaku, Nakamura Kannojo, and Nakamura Kyozo, a trio who share the honorific bestowed upon top-level Kabuki practitioners, perform scenes from the two major genres. The history play (*jidaimono*) tells the saga of two brothers avenging the murder of their father, and the naturalistic play (*sewamono*) concerns the love affair of the son of a dry-goods merchant. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 832-1155. Feb. 12-13 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 3.)

"The Edge of Uncertainty"—The Dimensions Dance Company, under the direction of Helanius J. Wilkins, makes its New York début in an evening-length work that considers death and its aftermath. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. Feb. 12 at 9 and Feb. 13 at 8.)

"Please Don't Leave Me"—The Brazilian choreographic team of Andrea Lerner and Rosane Chamecki present their Valentine's paean to romance, love, and the violent physical changes they bring on. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Feb. 11-14 at 8:30. Through Feb. 21.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Roger Davidson—Pianist, in a program of tangos. (Spanish Institute, 684 Park Ave. 628-0420. Feb 10 at 6:30.)

Steve Wilson Quartet—"Generations," Wilson's American début recording as a leader, gave notice that this poised, conservative alto saxophonist and flute player is far more than just a trustworthy sideman. He's come through on the substantial promise he's shown with, among many others, Leon Parker and Chick Corea. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9491. Feb. 12 at 5:30.)

Hawaiian Slack-Key-Guitar Festival—There have been cowboys in Hawaii since the early eighteen-hundreds. And, like their North American brothers, they have their own brand of guitar playing: slack key, wherein the strings are tuned down to a low and moaning open chord that makes the instrument snap, buzz, and gurgle like a Jew's

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harp in an empty saloon. For this somewhat bizarre and potentially beautiful evening, the indefatigable World Music Institute brings together three experts, George Kahumoku, Jr., Rev. Dennis Kamakahi, and Cyril Pahuini, along with a troupe of dancers. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Feb. 12 at 8.)

Valentine's Day Present—A triple bill of lush soul tunes featuring the Stylistics ("You Make Me Feel Brand New"), the Chi-Lites ("Have You Seen Her"), and the Main Ingredient ("Everybody Plays the Fool"), which is led by vocalist Cuba Gooding, father of the well-known actor. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Feb. 13 at 8.)

Huun-Huur Tu—Philatelists venerate Tuva (or Tannu Tuva, as this republic located on the Mongolian border was formerly known) for its exotic postage stamps, but its music is out of the ordinary, too. Practitioners of its native *khöömei* (throat singing) produce a guttural tenor melody and a high-pitched, flutelike descant simultaneously. It would be hard to gainsay *Soviet Life* magazine's description of the two timbres—"one reminiscent of the *homus*, a Tuvinian stringed instrument, and the other the mating call of the woodgrouse at dawn in spring"—or the legend that a Central Asian monk invented *khöömei* after hearing overtones in a waterfall. This ensemble of four Tuvan singers and instrumentalists offers a concert that is expected to include such favorites as "It's Probably Windy on Sagly Steppe" and "Do You Want Me to Saddle You?," both of which appear on the latest of their four disks on the Shanachie label. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Feb. 13 at 8.)

Ringo Starr and His All Starr Band—The drummer jams with some hardworking lads: Todd Rundgren, Joe Walsh, Simon Kirke (Bad Company), Gary Brooker (Procol Harum), and Jack Bruce (Cream). I believe in yesterday. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Feb. 16-17 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Feb. 11: Veteran songwriter and keyboardist **JIMMY WEBB,** whose hit-filled catalogue includes such classics as "Up, Up and Away," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," and the gloriously inscrutable "MacArthur Park." With singer-songwriter **SUSAN WERNER.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—A quartet from Halifax, Nova Scotia, with a love for the sounds of sixties Liverpool, **SLOAN** (Feb. 13) is known at home for its spotless songwriting and spotty live shows. With **INDUSTRIAL TEPEE.** Feb. 16: **SILVERCHAIR.** Fronted by a young Kurt Cobain look-alike, these Australian munchkins once enjoyed massive success by ripping off the music of Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Now they won't go away.

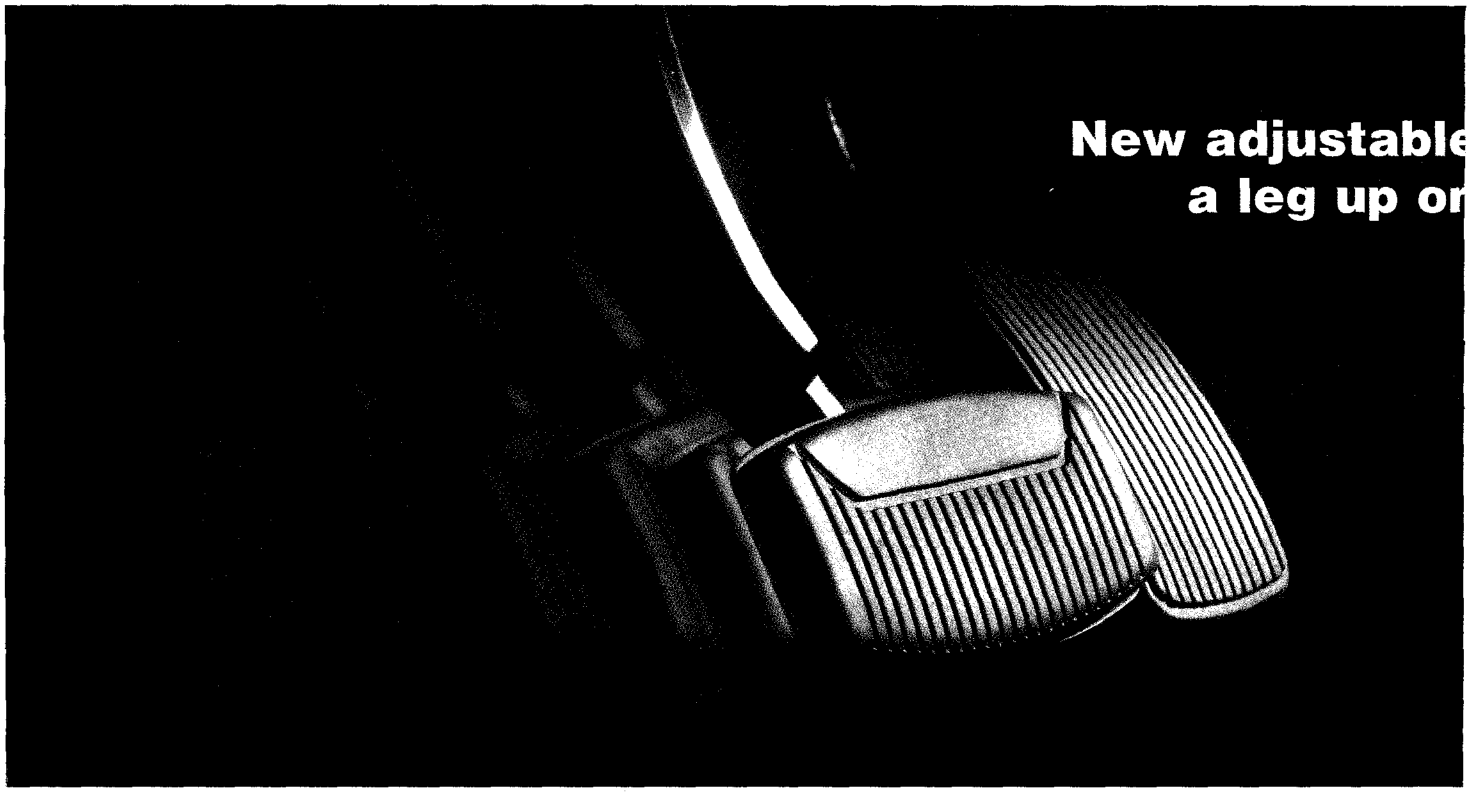
CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—A narrow, graffiti-strewn cave packed every evening with new and used bands. . . . ¶ Next door, at CB's Gallery, singer-songwriter **HAROLD AMBLER** (Feb. 10) takes a turn at the microphone.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. Feb. 12 and Feb. 14: Former Zombies vocalist **COLIN BLUNSTONE.** Feb. 16: **MELISSA FERRICK,** a twenty-eight-year-old singer-songwriter from Boston whose career has now got its second wind. Eight years ago, shortly after she dropped out of the Berklee College of Music, Morrissey picked her to open for his United States tour. More road action and a contract with Atlantic followed, as did two slow-moving albums and lots of pain and suffering after the label dumped her, in 1995. She went back to the small clubs and then found solace and support at last summer's Lilith Fair. She's since released a fierce, smart album, "Everything I Need," which amply demonstrates why she's worth listening to. With **MARTHA WAINWRIGHT.** The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 12: The **JAZZ MANDOLIN PROJECT,** a trio led by Jamie Mansfield, on mandolin, bassist Chris Dalgren, and drummer Jon Fishman, of the band Phish. Feb. 13: **GUIDED BY VOICES.** A few years back, this Dayton-based combo had gone from cult-confection status to near-stardom. But last year ringleader Pollard revamped the band, using members of a Cleveland outfit called Cobra Verde for its album "Mag Earwhig!," which resulted in a slightly edgier, though still recognizable, lo-fi sound. Pollard continues to tweak the lineup, so onstage the band may live up to its reputation as one of the few groups that actually sound better live. Or it may not. Either way, Pollard keeps trying. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—*Paper* magazine columnist and hip-hop spinner **DJ SPOOKY** (Feb. 10) celebrates Black History Month by taking over on Wednesdays in February.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Feb. 12-13: **SKANATRA,** a local outfit that specializes in setting the songs Frank made famous to ska beats. Feb.



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14: Australian post-punk folkie **BEN LEE** (also known as Claire Danes's boyfriend).

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Feb. 11: **LOTION,** the band best known for having Thomas Pynchon as a friend and advocate (he wrote the liner notes for one of the band's albums), preaches to the converted. With up-and-coming proto-folkie **PATTI ROTHBERG.**

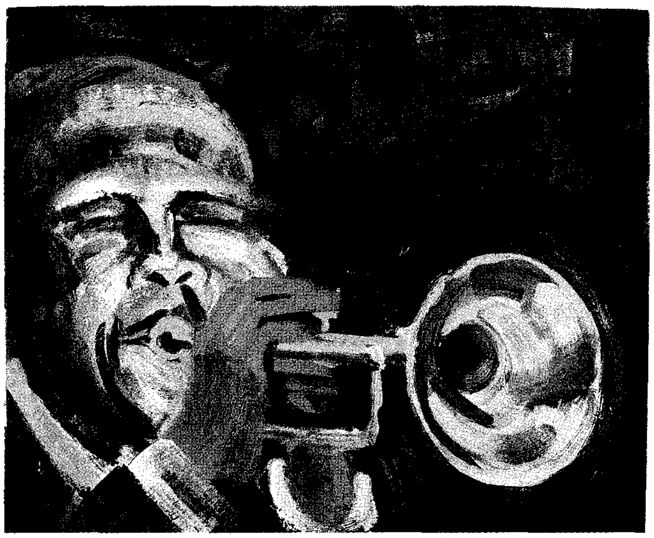
S.O.B.'S, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Feb. 11: Former Brand New Heavies vocalist **N'DEA DAVENPORT.** Feb. 16: **LOUP GAROU,** the local zydeco combo whose name is French for werewolf, celebrates Fat Tuesday. Dining.

TONIC, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Feb. 13: **OREN BLOEDOW,** guitarist and songwriter for indie darlings Elysian Fields, takes the stage.

TRAMPS, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Feb. 13: **LOUP GAROU** (See S.O.B.'s).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Feb. 11-13: The **RASHIED ALI–SONNY FORTUNE QUARTET.** Ali, John Coltrane's last drummer, and Fortune, a rugged saxophonist who's been seen with Elvin Jones (the man Ali replaced), investigate common ground. Don't be surprised if more than one Coltrane tune slips into the set. Feb. 14: **ANDY BEY,** the man who used to sing Horace Silver's love-peace-and-tolerance lyrics back in the seventies, has reinvented himself as an *Über-romantic. Letting ballads soak luxuriously in his plush tenor voice and setting them off with just-right piano chords, Bey sets a deep-blue mood of languor, longing, and loss. Happy Valentine's Day. Dining.*



MICHAEL CRAWFORD

Roy Hargrove, at the Village Vanguard.

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through March 13, the amazing **EARTHA KITT.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** is in attendance.

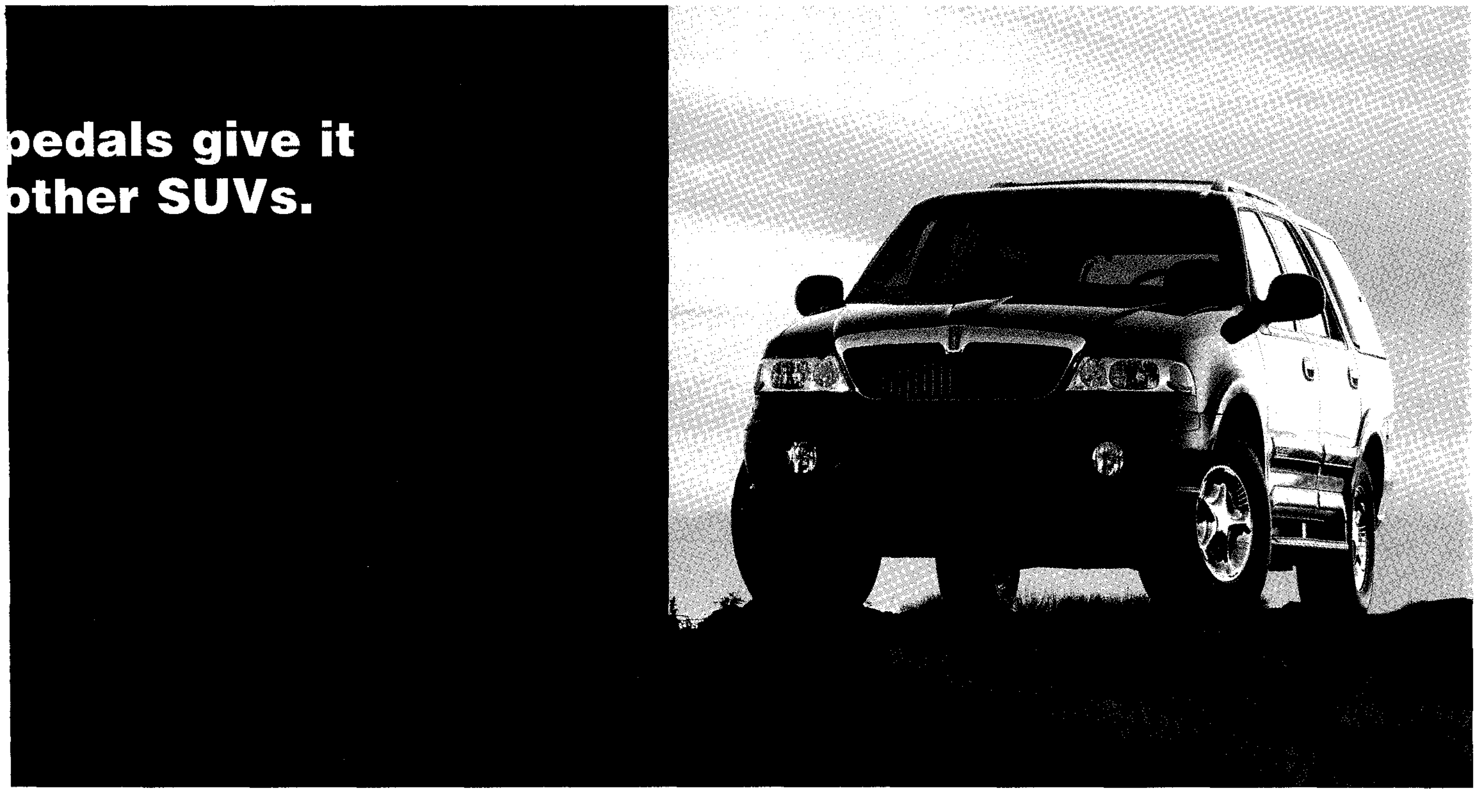
IRIDIUM, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Feb. 14: The **T. S. MONK** sextet. Drummer *Monk holds to the dictum "Honor thy father" with a passion.* His sturdy repertory ensemble continues to mine new gold from Thelonious Monk's fecund tunes. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Brass rails, vintage posters, Hirschfeld drawings, and a piano. Through Feb. 13: Pianist **JOHN BUNCH,** bassist **JAY LEONHART,** and drummer **JON WEBBER** revive the art of the perfectly aligned piano trio.

TONIC, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Feb. 12: Early-seventies funk-rock, blaxploitation grooves, subversive humor, and lots of attitude bubble over in clarinettist **DON BYRON'S** distinctly non-jazz, non-klezmer, non-classical project Existential Dred.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Feb. 14: The **ROY HARGROVE** sextet. *Paying your dues ain't what it used to be.* These days, no sooner do promising young jazz musicians breeze into town than they are at the helm of their own band, whether they have the artistic vision for the job or not. Trumpeter Hargrove got his own spot in a flash, but in the course of a productive decade he's proved to be a natural at ambitious bandleading. In his hands, conventional hard-bop quintets have given way to expansive big bands, Afro-Cuban ensembles, and, lately, a textured sextet. Hargrove's the competitive sort; his bandmates are there to keep him on his toes. Altoist Sherman Irby, trombonist Frank Lacy, and veteran pianist Larry Willis all have showstopper potential, yet they easily form a brilliant collage. Hargrove, like all smart leaders, provides the glue. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway *on Mondays.*

ZINC BAR, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Having played with drum deity Roy Haynes, the fluid post-bop pianist **DAVID KIKOSKI** (Feb. 9-10) knows from high energy and torrential swing.



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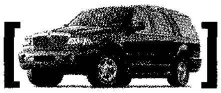
Lincoln Navigator. What a luxury [ **] should be.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper 1969-1993," a major exhibition presenting fifty-four drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and woodcuts acquired by the museum in 1995. Through March 21.... ¶ "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." Through March 28.... ¶ "Cubism and Fashion," at the Costume Institute, showcases some fabulous frocks, ranging from the elegant productions of French couture in the first decades of the century, by such designers as Jacques Doucet and Gabrielle Chanel, to shockers by Versace and Yves Saint Laurent. Beside some of the exhibits appear little reproductions of Cubist paintings, echoing the color and patterns of the clothes. Through March 14.... ¶ "From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Through Feb. 21.... ¶ "Charles Burchfield from the Collection," a survey of the museum's holdings of this great, eccentric American painter (1893-1967). Through Feb. 28.... ¶ "Félix Vallotton: Woodcuts and Three Paintings." Through Feb. 21.... ¶ "Jade of Ancient Costa Rica." Through Feb. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Julia Margaret Cameron's Women" presents fifty-seven prints by the early photographer (1815-79), whose idealized portraits of Victorian women (including Julia Jackson, the mother of Virginia Woolf, and Alice Liddell, the model for Lewis Carroll's Alice) often presented them as nymphs or goddesses. Through May 4.... ¶ "Sight Gags: Grotesque, Caricature, and Wit in Modern and Contemporary Drawing." Through May 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Picasso and the War Years: 1937-45" focusses on the paintings, sculptures, and works on paper made during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, including preparatory studies for "Guernica," as well as "The Charnel House" and "Night Fishing at Antibes." Through May 9.... ¶ "Jim Dine: Walking Memory, 1959-69." Opens Feb. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The Duane Hanson (1925-96) retrospective brings together a comprehensive selection of the artist's amazingly realistic re-creations of middle-class Americans: life-size casts of construction workers, a tough-looking cop, a weary maid, a bored flea-market vender. Through Feb. 28.... ¶ "Ray Johnson: Correspondences" chronicles the work of the founder of the "New York Correspondence School," one of the earliest examples of the mail-art movement. Through March 21.... ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28.... ¶ "Pale Guide to Transparent Things," an exhibition of photographs by Seton Smith. Through April 4.... ¶ "Circular Breathing," a video installation by Gary Hill. Through March 21. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Domestic Transformations: Working in Brooklyn" features paintings and sculptures by borough residents Ann Agee, Ron Baron, Jean Blackburn, and Andy Yoder. Through March 14.... ¶ "Lewis Wickes Hine: The Final Years" presents documentary work from the thirties, of such sites of immigrant activity as Ellis Island and the Lower East Side. The realist photographer (1874-1940) created this body of work hoping—in vain—to secure an assignment from the Farm Security Administration. Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

TABLES FOR TWO

Vatan, 409 Third Ave., at 29th St. (689-5666)—Though the décor conjures a typical Gujarat village of western India—a banyan tree, a well, a mural of emblematic Gujarati women, gem-studded portraits of Ganesh and other, less familiar deities—Vatan is not the Indian equivalent of the kitschy Polynesian palaces of the past. Instead of just stepping over the border into the exotic, the nineteen-dish meal (all you can eat) celebrates a vegetarian culinary culture still unusual to America, without debasing the food or corrupting the Jain and Hindu beliefs that drive its preparation: no meat, no fish, no poultry, no eggs, no violence.

Mahatma Gandhi was raised in Gujarat, and once you've eaten this delicious food, it may be tempting to conclude that his pacifist convictions were inspired in part by eating potato balls deep-fried in a chickpea-flour batter, boiled eggplant smashed with tomatoes, or, perhaps most aptly, the fierce carrot-and-chili pickles. You probably won't change your political beliefs here, but you can have a surprisingly romantic date in one of the spacious booths. The waitresses, who grew up in Bombay and Nepal, have adopted the complicated Gujarati culture flawlessly, and there's something tender in their presentation of the meal. The *khichdi*—rice yellowed by turmeric and lentils and mixed with vegetables—is married at the table to the *kadhi*, a yogurt soup thickened with chickpea flour. Blended together they turn a gorgeous pale gold, and taste of equal parts cream and pungence, in a way that can make you forget momentarily that you never called Gujarat home. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner only. Prix fixe $19.95.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"The Wormsley Library: A Personal Selection by Sir Paul Getty." More than a hundred volumes from one of the finest private libraries in the world, housed in Getty's estate in Buckinghamshire. The collection begins with a seventh-century scrap of paper, a fragment from Eusebius's history of the early Church, which may be the earliest surviving manuscript in the English language (not that you can read a word of it), and concludes with some gaudy modern bookbinding. In between, Sir Paul has assembled spectacular examples of the art of the book: exquisitely illuminated medieval manuscripts; one of the first great printed books, William Caxton's "Canterbury Tales" (as well as a fresh-looking 1896 Kelmscott Press edition of the same work); Ben Jonson's copy of "The Faerie Queen" and William Morris's copy of "Das Kapital"; and two perfect copies of Blake's "Songs of Innocence and of Experience." Still, there's something frustrating about exhibitions of books. What one really wants to do is flip through these gorgeous things, not peer at them in vitrines. Through May 2. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway (219-1222)—"Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz." This retrospective documents the restless life (1954-92) of an artist who was by turns a teen-age runaway, a gay activist, and an author. Wojnarowicz, a leader of the East Village art scene of the early eighties, never met a medium he didn't like, from photography and sculpture to comic books, video, and poetry. Most of the time, his fierce energy seems to dissipate itself across this gamut of interests. Occasionally, though, a single work snaps into focus, like his black-and-white photograph of toy buffaloes hurtling off a precipice. Though it was made famous by the rock group U2, who used it for the cover of their single "One," this concocted image retains a dreamy and unsettling power. (See also Uptown and Downtown Short Lists.) (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Alexander Calder (1898-1976)—Works on paper from the sixties and seventies, mostly big, playful lithographs of faces and geometric forms, in primary colors and black. An irritating suite of ink drawings, preparatory sketches for works the artist made for the Whitney Museum's catalogue for "Calder's Universe," raises the question: Do we need old men to make children's art? The best works in the show are two Surrealist drawings from the forties, of knobby organic shapes spiralling through space. Through March 6. (Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 489-3331.)

Charles Simonds—A veteran of the land-art and performance movements, Simonds now builds imaginary archeological ruins, relics of desert cities constructed from tiny clay bricks, and a maze that looks more ancient and primeval than the world itself. He uses the same materials to create bizarre organic forms, such as a group of flowers made of little teetering towers, which combine sharp edges and limber coils in a most compelling fashion. Through Feb. 20. (Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888.)

"Dish"—As the title says, dishes, ranging in style from the austere brutalism of Peter Voulkos to the dry good taste of Roy Lichtenstein. Viola Frey's "Fork and Spoon" is a riotous little world of kitsch figurines and big blobs, tossed like a salad and dressed in vivid color. An amusing group of plates painted with tropical scenes, by Ken Price, echoes the look of the mass-produced, junky pottery that tourists bring home from Mexico. Through Feb. 20. (Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St. 246-5360.)

"Shaker Gifts, Shaker Genius"—A fascinating glimpse into a vanished utopia—the world of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, known as the Shakers because of their violently active forms of worship (which included a style of dancing

MOST NEWS FOLLOWERS IMAGINE GLOBAL TERRORISM TO BE AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH.

In fact, terrorist acts have declined sharply in the 1990s. But the most spectacular incidents get so much attention, and the news coverage hits so hard, that they seem more and more frequent.

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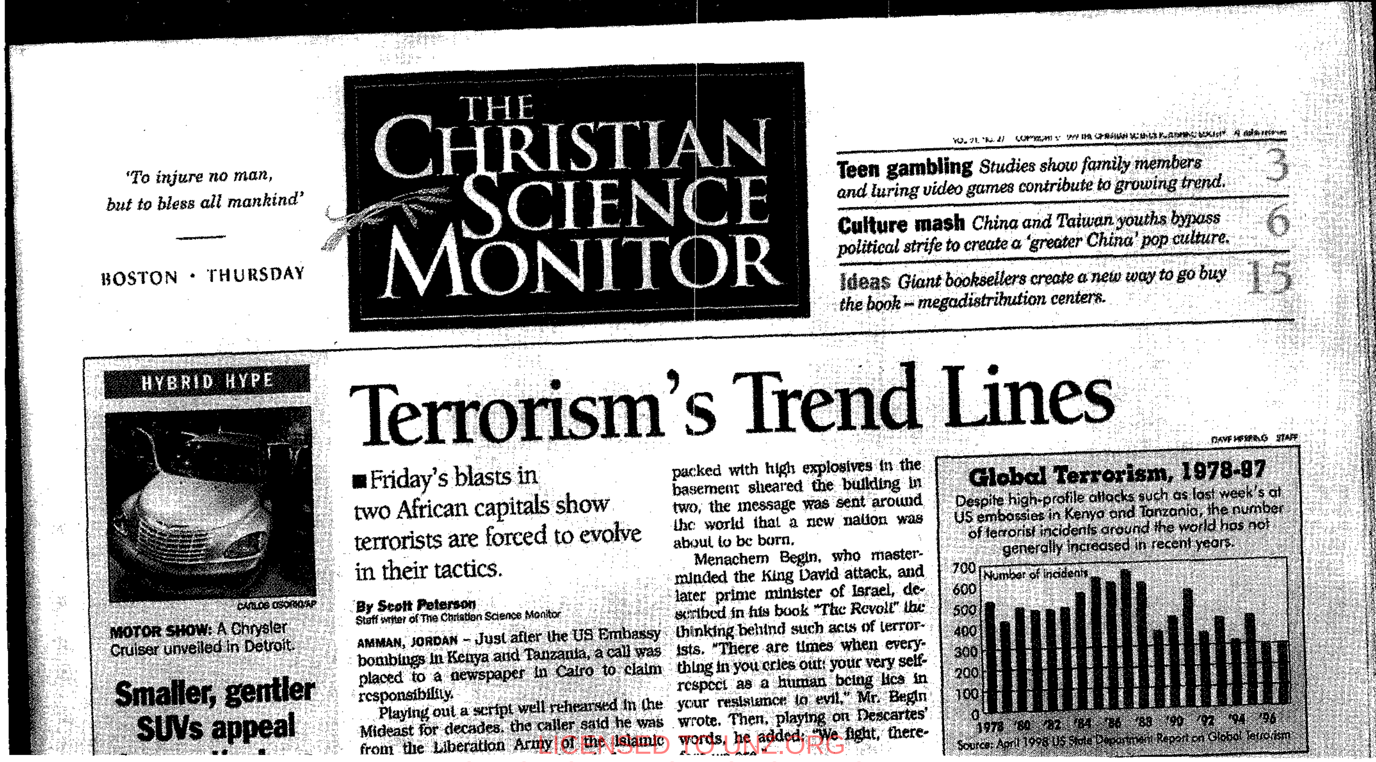


'To injure no man,
but to bless all mankind'

BOSTON · THURSDAY

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Teen gambling *Studies show family members and luring video games contribute to growing trend.* 3

Culture mash *China and Taiwan youths bypass political strife to create a 'greater China' pop culture.* 6

Ideas *Giant booksellers create a new way to go buy the book – megadistribution centers.* 15

HYBRID HYPE

CARLOS OSORIO/AP

MOTOR SHOW: A Chrysler Cruiser unveiled in Detroit.

Smaller, gentler SUVs appeal

Terrorism's Trend Lines

■ Friday's blasts in two African capitals show terrorists are forced to evolve in their tactics.

By Scott Peterson
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

AMMAN, JORDAN – Just after the US Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, a call was placed to a newspaper in Cairo to claim responsibility.

Playing out a script well rehearsed in the Mideast for decades, the caller said he was from the Liberation Army of the Islamic

packed with high explosives in the basement sheared the building in two, the message was sent around the world that a new nation was about to be born.

Menachem Begin, who masterminded the King David attack, and later prime minister of Israel, described in his book "The Revolt" the thinking behind such acts of terrorists. "There are times when everything in you cries out: your very self-respect as a human being lies in your resistance to evil," Mr. Begin wrote. Then, playing on Descartes' words, he added: "We fight, there-

DAVE HERRING – STAFF

Global Terrorism, 1978-97

Despite high-profile attacks such as last week's at US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the number of terrorist incidents around the world has not generally increased in recent years.

Source: April 1998 US State Department Report on Global Terrorism suspiciously akin to the bunny hop). The hundreds of objects on display here, from the Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, New York, include fine examples of the group's celebrated furniture and textiles, as you would expect, as well as a complete cabinetmaker's shop, a charming dollhouse room, and a hand-operated, horse-drawn fire wagon; apparently, the cult was vulnerable to the arsonous impulses of disgruntled dropouts. Through April 2. (PaineWebber Building, Sixth Ave. at 52nd St. 713-2885.)

Short List—**BENNY ANDREWS**, ACA, 41 E. 57th St. 644-8300. Through Feb. 27. . . . **DAMIAN LOEB**, Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Feb. 13. . . . **LOUIS LOZOWICK**, Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669. Through March 6. . . . **STEVEN MC CALLUM**, Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997. Through Feb. 20. . . . **CHRIS MACDONALD**, Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810. Through March 6. . . . **ELIZABETH NEWMAN**, Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Feb. 27. . . . **GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI**, Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7288. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5; through March 20. . . . **ED RUSCHA**, Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Feb. 27. . . . **KEITH SONNIER** and **VINCENT DESIDERIO**, Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; both shows through Feb. 13. . . . **RICHARD STANKIEWICZ**, Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through March 6. . . . **DAVID WOJNAROWICZ**, Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through March 6.

"Peregrine Falcon" (1995), by Victor Schrager, at Houk.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

"A Meditation on the Year 1960"—Poised as it is just before the explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptualism, the year in question is certainly a convenient one around which to organize a group exhibition. With sculptures, paintings, and works on paper by Carl Andre, Yayoi Kusama, Frank Stella, Piero Manzoni, and Jasper Johns, this show sketches the nascent sixties avant-garde as an international phenomenon rather than one confined to the United States. Through Feb. 27. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)

Short List—**R. CRUMB, PHILIP GUSTON, AND BARRY MC GEE**, Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through March 6. . . . **DIEGO GRAVINESE**, De Chiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007. Through Feb. 14. . . . **MELISSA GWYN**, Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500. Through Feb. 27. . . . **NINA KATCHADOURIAN**, Debs, 529 W. 20th St. 647-7080. Through Feb. 13. . . . **JOHN KIRCHNER**, Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 966-9024. Through Feb. 13. . . . **ALBERT OEHLEN**, Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through Feb. 27. . . . **PEGGY PREHEIM**, Bonakdar Jancou, 521 W. 21st St. 414-4144. Through Feb. 20. . . . **ROB PRUITT**, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258. Through Feb. 27. . . . **KENNETH SNELSON**, Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 463-8634. Through Feb. 27. . . . **MICHAEL TIMPSON** and **ELLEN HARVEY**, Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600. Both shows through Feb. 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Ben Katchor—Original drawings from the cartoonist and author's most recent book, "The Jew of New York," accompanied by vitrines full of wry artifacts. These include battered top hats, pickled herring, and a "clod of earth from the Garden of Eden," allegedly collected in 1856. As an exhibit, it's pretty modest. Katchor's pages, on the other hand, are marvels of draftsmanship and humor. Like a cross between Roz Chast and Caleb Carr, he envisions a beguilingly strange old New York, populated by clunky middle-aged wanderers. Through Feb. 28. (Bronfman Center, 7 E. 10th St. 998-4114. Open Mondays through Thursdays, 8 to 10; Fridays, 8 to 4.)

Takashi Murakami—A pair of humorous life-size figures and associated paintings (backdrops, really) by a prominent young Japanese artist. Both are naked, plastic, and ecstatic. The female version is a blue-haired porn princess, smiling as she jump-ropes a coil of milk that emerges from each of her beach-ball-size breasts. Her companion performs the male equivalent of lactation, gesturing triumphantly with his free hand as a lariat of semen rises toward the ceiling. Murakami claims to be inspired by *otaku*, the geeky Japanese subculture of animation and video games. The real inspiration, however, is probably Jeff (Teddy bears in flagrante) Koons. Through Feb. 18. (Boesky, 51 Greene St. 941-9888.)

David Salle—It's been twenty years since Salle first appeared on the scene, but with fourteen new paintings divided between two blue-chip galleries, his latest work looks, well, as promising and unsatisfying as ever. The main surprise is how little his formula has changed. He's still channel-surfing the same half-dozen stations that he tuned in to in his twenties. There's the amateur still-life, the lackluster abstraction, the fifties furniture and architecture, and now, instead of naked women posing for some creepy S & M stag film, there are circus bears performing on bicycles. From a distance, the heterogeneity sparks a kind of flea-market optimism; up close, though, free association has never looked so routine. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through March 6. . . . Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 27.)

Short List—**RITA ACKERMANN** and **ANA AXPE**, Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Spring St. 925-2035. Both shows through March 23. . . . **ANSELME BOIX-VIVES**, Ross, 568 Broadway. 343-2161. Through Feb. 27. . . . **SUZAN FRECON**, Markey, 55 Vandam St. 627-4446. Through March 13. . . . **RICHARD GAFFNEY**, Atlantic, 40 Wooster St. 219-3183. Through Feb. 13. . . . **MICHAEL GOLDBERG**, Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012. Through Feb. 20. . . . **LISA HOKE**, Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through Feb. 27. . . . **MICHAEL LUCERO**, Beitzel, 102 Prince St. 219-2863. Through Feb. 27. . . . **TONY MATELLI**, Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through Feb. 13. . . . **PAUL MC CARTHY AND JASON RHOADES**, Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Feb. 13. . . . **ROXY PAINE**, Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Feb. 20. . . . **JUDY PFAFF**, McCready, 425 W. 13th St. 243-0439. Through Feb. 27. . . . **ROGER SHIMOMURA**, Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through Feb. 13. . . . **SANDY SKOGLUND**, Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Feb. 13. . . . **JORDAN TINKER**, Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through Feb. 27. . . . **DAVID WOJNAROWICZ**, Gracie Mansion Gallery, 54 St. Marks Pl. 505-7055. Closed Tuesdays, opens at noon; through Feb. 27.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Feb 10: An arcade auction of moderately priced jewelry. . . . ¶ Feb. 10-12: Nineteenth- and (mostly) twentieth-century prints, including two portfolios of works by famous Pop artists. . . . ¶ Feb. 16: Moderately priced Impressionist, modern, and contemporary paintings. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's East—Antique and fine jewelry, including many items offered with no reserve. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430. Feb. 11.)

Doyle—Feb. 10: Decorative arts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. . . . ¶ Feb. 16: "The Final Vinyl Auction," that is, an impressive collection of almost fifty thousand recordings by popular singers of the fifties and sixties, along with related ephemera, all collected by Tom Margellar, Jr., a Detroit d.j. who was murdered by his brother-in-law in 1997. (His widow confessed to having cleaned up the blood; now *there's* the stuff of a fifties blues hit!) (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

Swann—An auction of photographs and photography books. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Feb. 11.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

STEPHANE COUTURIER / "VISAGE"—Large-scale Cibachrome prints of construction sites in Paris, Dresden, and Berlin. / Fifteen vintage portraits by, among others, Julia Margaret Cameron, Walker Evans, Berenice Abbott, and Larry Burrows. Both shows through March 27. (Laurence Miller, at its new address, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

"AMERICA AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1954-1968"—A group show, curated by Steven Kasher, of well-known and obscure photographs, including images by Ben Fernandez, Bruce Davidson, Eve Arnold, and Danny Lyon. Through March 19. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Please call for limited exhibition hours.)

"NAKED"—Works by Elinor Carucci, Gerald Slota, Jayne Hinds Bidaut, Michael Martone, and others. Through March 6. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY—"Bruce Davidson: The Brooklyn Gang, 1959." Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

SHORT LIST—**GUY BOURDIN**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through March 6. . . . **KEITH CARTER**, Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through March 13. . . . **JAMES CASEBERE**, Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through March 6. . . . **BRUCE CRATSLEY**, Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Feb. 14. . . . **WILLIAM EGGLESTON**, Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Feb. 27. . . . **ELGER ESSER**, Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through Feb. 13. . . . **FRANZ HUBMANN** and **ERIKA HUBATSCHEK**, Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **SY KATTELSON**, Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through March 13. . . . **BUILDER LEVY** and **EMMA AMOS**, Art Resources Transfer, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 691-5956. Open Sundays; through Feb. 21. . . . **D. W. MELLOR** and **JOSEF SUDEK**, Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **BARBARA POLLACK**, at Holly Solomon (172 Mercer St., 941-5777; through Feb. 27) and Thread Waxing Space (476 Broadway, 966-9520; through March 6). . . . **VICTOR SCHRAGER**, Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through March 6. . . . **JAN STALLER**, Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through Feb. 27. . . . **FRANK YAMRUS**, Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through March 6.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

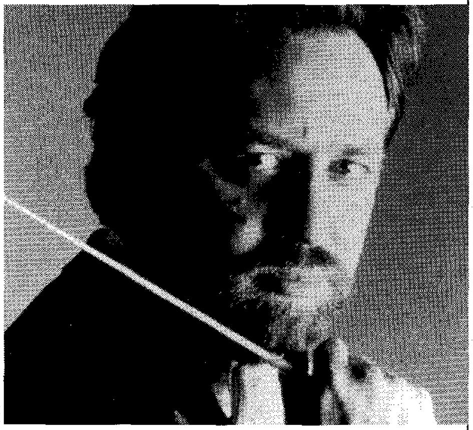
METROPOLITAN OPERA—**AIDA**, with Hasmik Papian, Dolora Zajick, Dennis O'Neill, and Paolo Gavanelli; conducted by Plácido Domingo. (Feb. 10 at 7:30 and Feb. 13 at 1:30.) . . . Schoenberg's **MOSES UND ARON**, with Philip Langridge and John Tomlinson in the title roles; James Levine. (Feb. 11 at 8.) . . . **IL TROVATORE**, with Michele Crider, Larissa Diadkova, Richard Margison, and Mr. Gavanelli; Jun Märkl. (Feb. 12 and Feb. 15 at 8.) . . . **SIMON BOCCANEGRA**, by Verdi, with Karita Mattila, Michael Sylvester, Alexandru Agache, and Paul Plishka; Mr. Levine. (Feb. 13 at 8:30.) . . . **LA BOHÈME**, with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Emily Pulley, Tito Beltran, and Gino Quilico; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 16 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

RICCARDO CHAILLY, CONDUCTOR

Friday, February 12 at 8:00
VADIM REPIN, VIOLIN
Brahms: Violin Concerto
Schoenberg: Five Pieces for Orchestra
Brahms: Symphony No.2
Pre-concert lecture by Karen Painter at 7:00, Kaplan Penthouse

Sunday, February 14 at 3:00
RONALD BRAUTIGAM, PIANO
PETER MASSEURS, TRUMPET
Shostakovich: Hamlet Suite (Selections)
Shostakovich: Concerto No.1 for Piano, Trumpet and Orchestra, Op.35
Rachmaninoff: Symphony No.2 in E minor
Pre-concert lecture by Harlow Robinson at 2:00, Kaplan Penthouse



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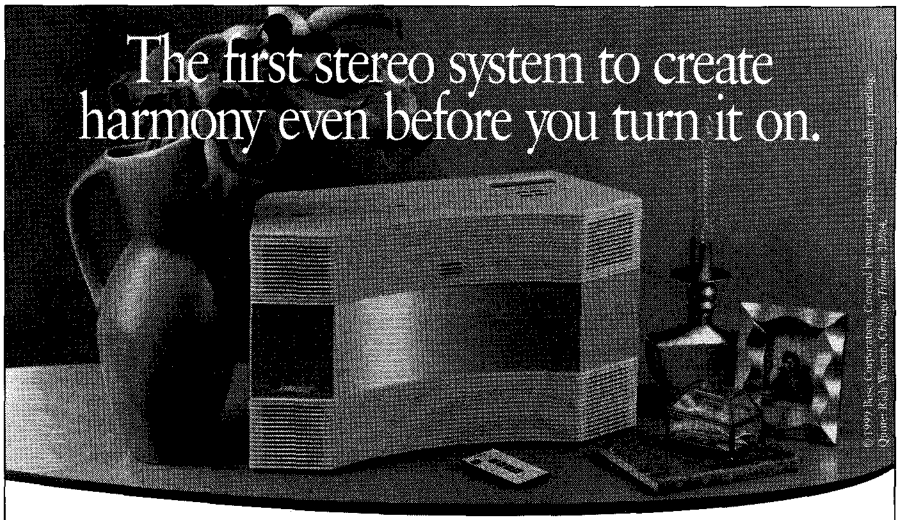
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Opera Orchestra of New York—A recital of arias, with sopranos Ghena Dimitrova, Alessandra Marc, and Aprile Millo, among others. Eve Queler conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 14 at 8:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Valery Gergiev conducts Borodin's Symphony No. 2, Debussy's "La Mer," and Bartók's "Miraculous Mandarin" Suite. (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 11, Feb. 13, and Feb. 16 at 8.)

Voices of Ascension—The choir, directed by Dennis Keene, performs a wide-ranging program. (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 254-8553. Feb. 10 at 8.)

Padua Chamber Orchestra—David Golub leads (from the piano) Bach's "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 5 and Bloch's Concerto Grosso No. 1. The concert also includes Mozart's Clarinet Concerto (with David Shifrin) and his Symphony No. 21. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 10 at 8.)

Pro Music Nipponia—Percussionist Evelyn Glennie joins the Japanese folkloric ensemble to perform works by, among others, Minoru Miki, including his "Requiem 1999," a concerto for marimba and traditional Japanese instruments. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 10 at 8.)

Boston Symphony—Seiji Ozawa conducts Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Anne-Sophie Mutter) and Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps." (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 10-11 at 8.)

Il Giardino Armonico—The Italian period-instrument ensemble, led by Giovanni Antonini, performs a concerto grosso by Handel, Vivaldi's F-Major Recorder Concerto (with Mr. Antonini as soloist), Biber's "Battaglia," and Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons." (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 11 at 8.)

New York Pops—Skitch Henderson leads Holst's "The Planets" and other astronomical pieces. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 12 at 8.)

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra—At Avery Fisher Hall, Riccardo Chailly conducting. Feb. 12 at 8: Brahms's Violin Concerto (featuring Vadim Repin), Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, and Brahms's Symphony No. 2. . . . ¶ Feb. 14 at 3: Shostakovich's "Hamlet" Suite and Piano Concerto No. 1 (with pianist Ronald Brautigam and trumpeter Peter Masseurs) and Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2.

Netherlands Symphony Orchestra—Jaap van Zweden conducts Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Eliane Rodrigues), Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5, and "Etchings of Rembrandt," written in 1906 by Willem Mengelberg (whose conducting overshadowed his work as a composer). (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 13 at 8.)

New York Chamber Symphony—Gerard Schwarz conducts Cherubini's Symphony in D Major, Mozart's B-Flat-Major Piano Concerto (K. 450, with Anton Kuerti), and Bartók's "Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta." (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 13 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 5. . . . **note:** Ticket holders may wish to check with the box office about the status of this concert, which at press time was threatened by an unresolved union negotiation.)

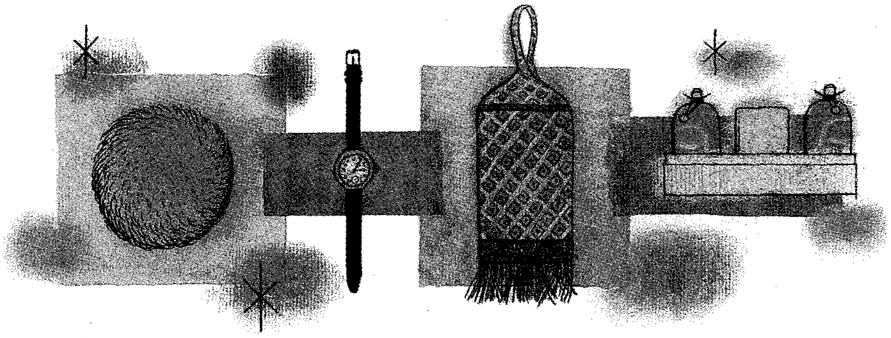
Scottish Chamber Orchestra—Joseph Swenson conducting. Feb. 13 at 8: Beethoven's Symphony No. 1, Barber's Violin Concerto (featuring Robert McDuffie), and Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3. (Colden Center, Queens College, Flushing. 718-793-8080.) . . . ¶ Feb. 14 at 2: James MacMillan's "I (A Meditation on Iona)," Barber's Violin Concerto (with Mr. McDuffie), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. Feb. 14 at 2. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

Ars Antiqua and the Choir of St. Ignatius Loyola—The period-instrument ensemble and the singers join forces for an all-Bach concert that includes his "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 6 and his Cantata No. 106 ("Actus Tragicus"). (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Feb. 14 at 4.)

Juilliard Orchestra—Robert Spano conducts Corigliano's Clarinet Concerto (featuring Alexander Fiterstein) and Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 15 at 8.)

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

The Pleasures of Pink



It will come as a relief to those who follow fashion that gray, the designated color of winter '98-'99, is shortly to be replaced by pink. As with all such dicta, caution is key; if head-to-toe gray made everyone look like sad little wrens, might not a surfeit of pink turn ordinary workingwomen into superannuated Tinker Bells?

Even if you usually cast a cold eye on this hue, February 14 is one day when a pink gift can strike just the right note. At **Takashimaya** (693 Fifth Ave.; 800-753-2038), a Japanese department store with a pronounced affection for things European, a box from the English firm of Czech & Speake contains a trio of rose-colored products—cologne, bath oil, and a little bar of soap ($89); the tiny Florentine firm Santa Maria Novella, a company that can hardly be accused of trendiness, since it's been around since the twelfth century, offers nine milligrams of rose perfume ($65). A voluptuous coral-colored ostrich-feather powder puff ($55) looks as if it would be happy sitting on a glass dressing table.

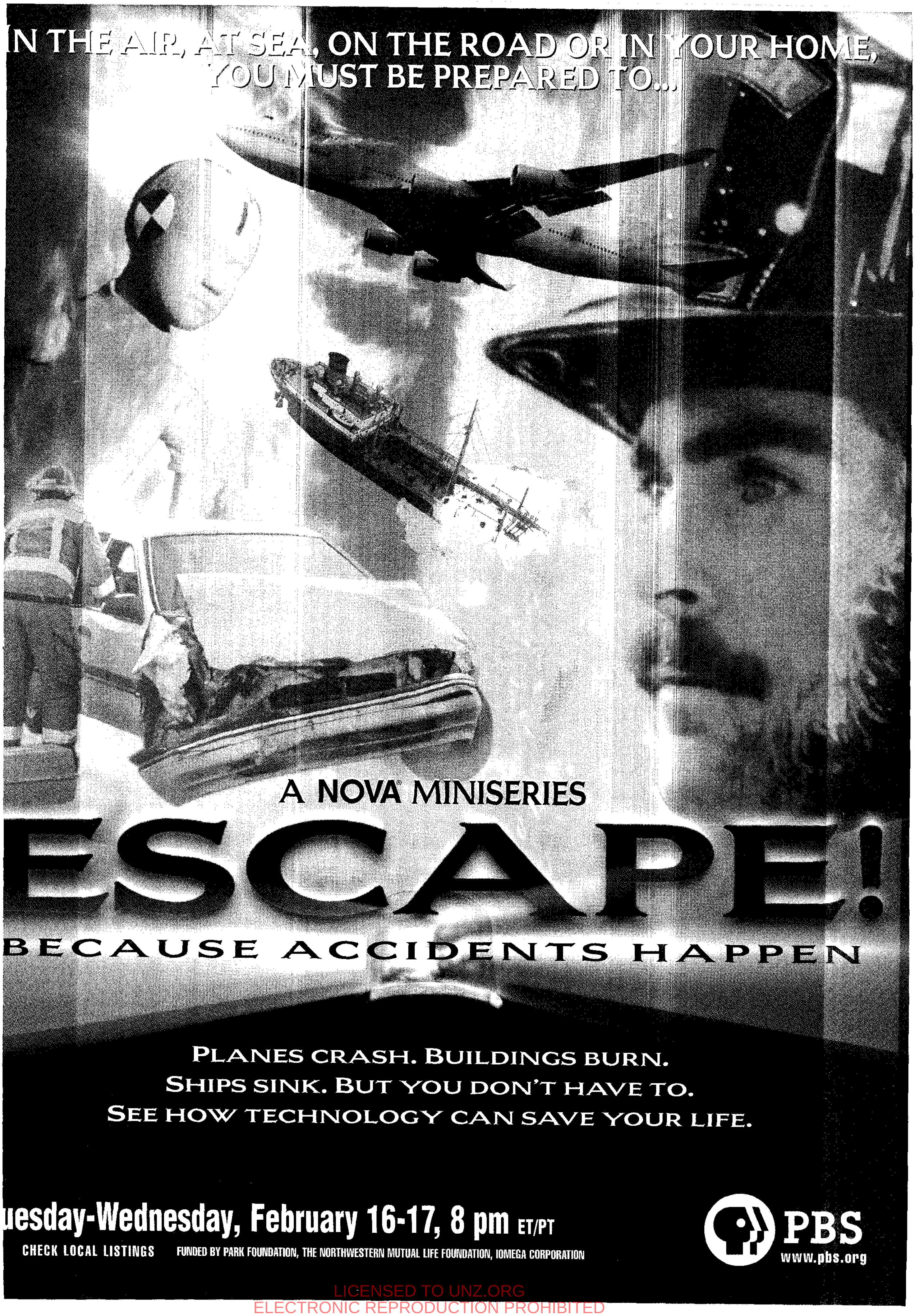
On the store's fourth floor, a singular item inhabits the shadowy turf between amulet and evening purse: a black silk triangular pouch by Emily Jo Gibbs of London which has been decorated with an oxidized-metal maple leaf bearing a faint tracery of fuchsia ($425). It could be hung from a belt, or from a very self-confident neck, and is just roomy enough for a tube of MAC Vamp and a Metrocard.

If all this might please someone who doesn't particularly think of herself as a pink person, so would Takashimaya's one-of-a-kind vintage pink-gold Rolex Oyster watch, which has a sunburst dial, blue steel hands, and a $6,100 price tag. Originally sold at Harrod's, circa 1928, it is slender enough to shame all those chunky sports monstrosities weighing down everyone else's wrist. Though this item was intended to be worn by a man—the name and home town of its former owner, "Dr. Mac Laverty, Galway," are engraved on the back of the case—seventy years later it would make a spectacular gift for a valentine of either gender.

A far less serious financial commitment is required by the Parisian shoemaker **René Mancini**, whose eponymous store holds down a corner on shop-deprived Park Avenue in midtown (470 Park Ave.; 308-7644). Among the timeless styles available here are low-heeled mules covered with pale-pink silk grosgrain fabric and embellished with flat bows ($275). Though no doubt intended to clatter along the kind of boudoir floors last seen in a Rouben Mamoulian film, they could probably withstand the rigors of a brief stroll down a beach in the Hamptons.

The tiny shop **Jamin Puech** (252 Mott St.; 334-9730), nestled in the funky-glamorous neighborhood that has sprung up around Old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mulberry Street, specializes in the sort of artistic handbag that Vanessa Bell might have bought as a souvenir of her 1906 trip to Constantinople. A rectangular reticule features a bevy of cherry-colored sequins imprisoned by a border of turquoise trapezoids ($250); another example, lined with brown velvet and meant to dangle from the wrist, juxtaposes pale-pink and yellow paillettes with black-beaded fringe ($200).

If all this seems too exquisite, a visit to **Hotel Venus**, Patricia Field's SoHo emporium (382 West Broadway; 966-4066) may restore some balance. While the shop's callow sales staff discusses the previous night's debauchery, you can examine mauve fake-fur leg warmers ($62), magnolia-colored cowboy hats ($25), and pearlized patent-leather rhinestone-studded slave bracelets ($13). A raspberry metal-mesh camisole ($182), whose color would surely be even more delectable glimpsed in the staccato light reflected by a disco ball, is so vivacious that, in its own way, it's a classic equal to Dr. Laverty's old wristwatch.



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RECITALS

Festival Chamber Music Society—Performing trios by Beethoven, Khachaturian, and Dvořák. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 10 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Oboist Steven Taylor, violinist Anna Elashvili, violist Paul Neubauer, cellist Fred Sherry, and pianist Peter Serkin team up for a concert of works by Haydn (two of his piano trios), Oliver Knussen (including the première of a solo-cello work), and Takemitsu. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Feb. 11 at 7:30 and Feb. 14 at 4.)

Alaria Chamber Ensemble—Performing Schubert's "Trout" Quintet, songs by Schubert and Mahler, and Dohnányi's Serenade for String Trio. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 11 at 8.)

Sari Gruber and Philip Cutlip—The soprano and the baritone perform early-twentieth-century French art songs, by Lili Boulanger, André Caplet, Debussy, Poulenc, and others. Pianist Michael Boriskin assists. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 11 at 8.)

Music by Charles Wuorinen—Oliver Knussen leads a group of chamber players in Wuorinen's "The River of Light" and "The Great Procession." (Guggenheim Museum Auditorium, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 423-3587. Feb. 12-13 at 8.)

Arnaldo Cohen—The pianist offers Liszt's B-Minor Sonata, Schumann's "Arabesque," Debussy's "Images" (Book One), and several works by Chopin. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Feb. 13 at 8.)

Guarneri Quartet—Playing string quartets by Mozart (two early ones), Schumann (in A Major), and Dvořák (in A-Flat Major, Op. 105). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 13 at 8.)

New York's Ensemble for Early Music—The group presents a Valentine's-weekend concert of love-inspired pieces by Machaut, Isaac, Monteverdi, Dowland, and other luminaries of centuries well past. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Feb. 13 at 8 and Feb. 14 at 3. For information about tickets to these benefit concerts, call 749-6600.)

Avner Arad and Albert Kim—Performing works for piano four-hands, by Dvořák, Brahms, and others. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Feb. 14 at noon. . . . ¶ Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Feb. 14 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Gwhyneth Chen—In 1994, at the age of twenty-three, this pianist (formerly known as Edith Chen) won the $100,000 top prize of the First Ivo Pogorelich International Solo Piano Competition and donated the entire sum to a Buddhist monastery in California. Here she performs Schumann's C-Major Fantasy, Scriabin's Sonata No. 3, Stravinsky's "Trois Mouvements de 'Petrouchka,' " and a work by Robert Strassburg. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 14 at 2.)

New York Philharmonic Ensembles—Members of the orchestra perform Holst's Terzetto for Flute, Oboe, and Viola (from 1925, in which each musician's part is conceived and written in a different key), Randall Svane's String Quartet, Guillaume Lekeu's Piano Trio, and Poulenc's "Le Bal Masqué" (sung by baritone Kurt Ollmann). (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 14 at 3.)

L'Antica Musica New York—Amorous music and dramatic recitations from Renaissance and Baroque England, in celebration of Valentine's Day. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. Feb. 14 at 3.)

Dufay Collective—The English early-music group presents estampies and other medieval songs and dances. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Feb. 14 at 4.)

Florence Quivar—The mezzo-soprano, assisted by pianist Wayne Sanders, performs works by more than a dozen black composers, including William Grant Still and Camille Nickerson. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Feb. 14 at 3.)

Two Quartets—The Brentano and St. Lawrence String Quartets share a short program; the former plays Tchaikovsky's Quartet No. 3, and the latter Osvaldo Golijov's "Last Round" (with double-bassist Mark Dresser assisting). (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 15 at 6:45.)

George Vatchnadze—Pianist, performing sonatas by Stravinsky, Bernstein (a student work from 1938), and Prokofiev (his Sixth), in addition to Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit." (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 15 at 8.)

Maxim Vengerov—The violinist, assisted by pianist Igor Uryash, performs sonatas by Brahms (his Second) and Prokofiev (his First), in addition to works by Ravel, Sarasate, Rachmaninoff, and Franz Waxman. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 16 at 8.)

Rongchun Zhao—Even in this city of musical diversity, it is not often that music lovers get the opportunity to attend a complete *erhu* recital. Mr. Zhao, a native of northeastern China and a leading virtuoso of that Chinese bowed string instrument, is newly established in New York City following a stint in Cleveland (where his musical engagements included a much heralded début with the Cleveland Orchestra). In this recital, he performs traditional and modern Chinese compositions, as well as *erhu* transcriptions of such Western favorites as Bach's "Air on the G String" and the Dinicu-Heifetz "Hora Staccato." Pianist Lucile Soulié assists. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 16 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"DisAster Place"—The East Village block that's now home to Kmart and Starbucks was once the site of the second-worst riot in the history of the city. Brought on by a feud between the American actor Edwin Forrest and the British actor William C. Macready, the melee on May 10, 1849, in which twenty-two people were killed (and more than a hundred and fifty injured), was fuelled, in part, by class rage and objections to an influx of affluence to the neighborhood. Macready, whom the Boweryites identified with the English aristocracy, was wrapping up a United States tour with a production of "Macbeth" at the Astor Opera House, a newly constructed theatre with a fancy dress code, among other requirements for admission. Forrest mounted a rival production of "Macbeth" at a nearby theatre (reportedly receiving a thundering ovation when he delivered the line "What rhubarb, senna or what purgative drug will scour these English hence?"), and his supporters touched off the violence when they disrupted Macready's show. On Feb. 12 at 7, veteran producer Himan Brown sets up microphones near the site of the riot and directs Tony Roberts, Michael Wager, Diana Kirkwood, and other actors in a radio dramatization of the tragedy. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. For more information, call 353-4198.)

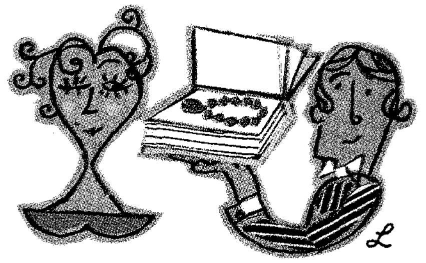
Readings—Feb. 11 at 7: By John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, Patrick McGrath, Joyce Carol Oates, and George Plimpton, from, respectively, the newly published works of Vaslav Nijinsky, Djuna Barnes, Anton Chekhov, Yasunari Kawabata, and Truman Capote. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5488.) . . . ¶ Feb. 16 at 7: By Martin Amis and Mary Gaitskill. (Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Square S. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Feb. 16 at 7: By Philip Hamburger, from his new collection of *New Yorker* pieces, "Friends Talking in the Night." (Lenox Hill Bookstore, Lexington Ave. at 73rd St. No tickets necessary.)

Talk—Feb. 10 at 8: K. Anthony Appiah, professor of philosophy at Harvard, interviews exiled Ugandan writer Vincent Magombe. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Glittering Prizes

Formed a hundred miles down into the Earth's mantle, the crystalline form of carbon known as diamond is not only Earth's most durable mineral but also one of its oldest: the Cullinan diamond, the largest ever discovered, is at least 1.6 billion years old. Patrick Voillot's **Diamonds and Precious Stones** (Discoveries) is a compact and approachable induction in the mysteries of the lapidary art and the rich folklore of jewels. Nowhere is such lore better exploited than in Wilkie Collins's **The Moonstone** (reissued in the Oxford World's Classics line), which spawned an entire subgenre of detective stories involving ancient gems whose successive owners find themselves in mortal danger.



Yet there's more to jewelry than just carats and curses. In **Amber** (Harvard), Andrew Ross discusses the decorative uses of the burnt-orange translucent resin and gives handy instructions on the (surprisingly simple) methods of telling the genuine article from the fake; he goes on to expound on amber's scientific value, showing how it can provide a superb record of species and habitats that vanished millions of years ago. Amber is also included among the myriad materials in Lois Sherr Dubin's ambitiously titled **The History of Beads, from 30,000 B.C. to the Present** (Abrams), which ranges from Paleolithic tooth necklaces to medieval rosaries to nineteenth-century netsuke.

Vivienne Becker's **Art Nouveau Jewelry** (Thames and Hudson) surveys the work of the turn-of-the-century jewellers who broke from the precepts of classical gem cutting and setting to produce an exotic, erotic riot of enamelled satyrs, opalescent orchids, and aquamarine dragons. **The Jewels of Lalique** (Flammarion), edited by Yvonne Brunhammer, examines the work of one of Art Nouveau's most celebrated designers, René Lalique, whose eclectic choice of materials led him gradually away from jewelry and toward the rhapsodic glassware for which he is now best known. Those readers who feel themselves seduced by these fantasies might bear in mind the cautionary words of fashionable Aunt Alicia in Colette's "Gigi": "Don't ever wear artistic jewelry; it wrecks a woman's reputation."

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

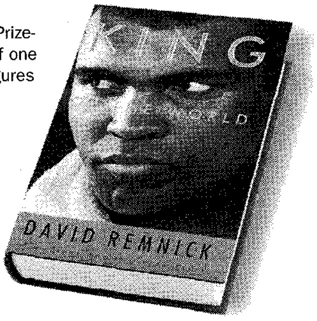
Looking Back... Looking Forward

KING OF THE WORLD

by David Remnick

The *New Yorker* editor and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist follows the rise of one of America's most mythic sports figures from his determined beginning as Cassius Clay to his triumph as Muhammad Ali.
(Random House)

Pub. Price: $25.00
Discount **30%**
B&N Price $17.50


KING OF THE WORLD
DAVID REMNICK

THE COLOR OF OUR FUTURE

by Farai Chideya

ABC News correspondent Farai Chideya draws on her conversations with young men and women from across the country to paint a vivid portrait of a nation in transition as America ceases to be defined by race and enters a more complex, multi-ethnic era.
(William Morrow)

Pub. Price: $23.00
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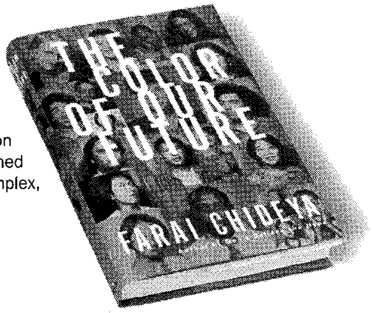
B&N Price $16.10

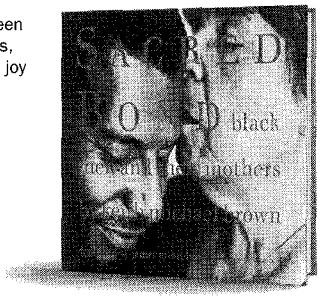

THE COLOR OF OUR FUTURE
FARAI CHIDEYA

SACRED BOND

by Keith Michael Brown

Celebrating the unique bond between African-American mothers and sons, these powerful stories explore the joy and pain of real-life relationships.
(Little, Brown)

Pub. Price: $25.00
Discount **30%**
B&N Price $17.50


SACRED BOND
black men and their mothers
Keith Michael Brown

WATCH ME FLY

by Myrlie Evers-Williams with Melinda Blau

The former NAACP chairwoman and widow of Medgar Evers shares a lifetime of insight on single parenting, women in corporate America, her political activism and personal determination.
(Little, Brown)

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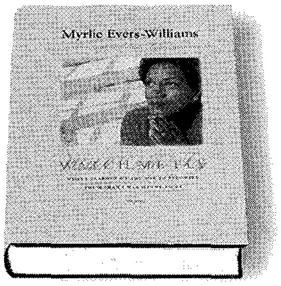
Myrlie Evers-Williams
WATCH ME FLY

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON LEADERSHIP

by Donald T. Phillips

The author of *Lincoln on Leadership* shows potential leaders how to apply Dr. King's strategies and philosophies to any organization to effect positive and lasting change.
(Warner Books)

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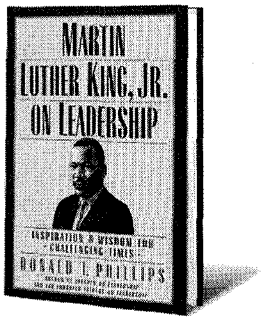
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON LEADERSHIP
INSPIRATION & WISDOM FOR CHALLENGING TIMES
DONALD T. PHILLIPS

THE HAIRSTONS

by Henry Wiencek

Weaving together the exceptional stories of hundreds of descendants of the largest mixed race family in America, the author uncovers a fascinating saga.
(St. Martin's Press)

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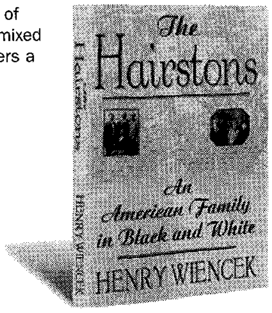
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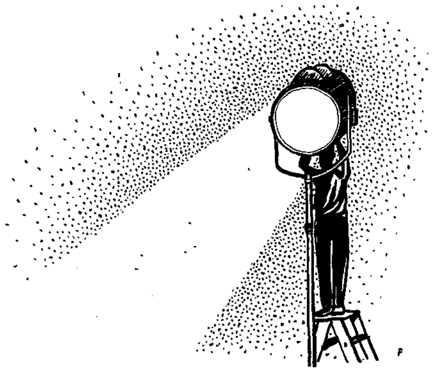


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Blast from the Past—Hugh Wilson's romantic comedy, with Brendan Fraser, Alicia Silverstone, Sissy Spacek, Christopher Walken, and Dave Foley. Opening Feb. 12.

God Said, "Ha!"—A filmed version of Julia Sweeney's one-woman Broadway show. Opening Feb. 12. (Film Forum.)

Message in a Bottle—A woman (Robin Wright Penn) finds the message and goes in search of the sender. With Kevin Costner and Paul Newman; directed by Luis Mandoki. Opening Feb. 12. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square.)

My Favorite Martian—A comedy based on the sixties television series, with Jeff Daniels, Christopher Lloyd, and Elizabeth Hurley. Directed by Donald Petrie. Opening Feb. 12.

Party Monster—A documentary about nightlife promoter and convicted murderer Michael Alig. Directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato. Opening Feb. 12. (Cinema Village.)

Tango—Carlos Saura's feature about the making of a dance film. In Spanish. Opening Feb. 12. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Trio—Hermine Huntgeburth's romantic comedy about father and daughter pickpockets who are in love with the same man. In German. Opening Feb. 12. (Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Affliction—Nick Nolte, committing himself to a difficult part with a manly readiness that inspires affection, even awe, is Wade Whitehouse, a divorced policeman and hired hand floundering badly in a snowbound New Hampshire town. Both kindly and belligerent, Wade misses the meaning and rhythm of events, and reacts too much or too little, erupting in anger over what he should laugh off, ridiculing what he should take seriously. Writer-director Paul Schrader flinches at nothing and takes us deep into the texture and causes of this man's failure. With James Coburn as Wade's horrifying father, Willem Dafoe as his brother, Sissy Spacek as his girlfriend, and Mary Beth Hurt as his ex-wife. Schrader adapted Russell Banks's 1989 novel himself.—*David Denby* (1/11/99) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.)

Central Station—Against her nature, Dora (Fernanda Montenegro), an intelligent but nihilistic old bag—a retired schoolteacher who writes letters for illiterate people and then never mails them—leaves Rio de Janeiro with a little boy in tow and takes to the road. The boy's mother has been killed, and his desire to see his missing father stirs something in Dora. The two of them are practically hoboes, but once they leave Rio life opens up for them. This shrewd, tough, and bighearted Brazilian movie, directed by Walter Salles, moves surely and convincingly from utter negation to something like guarded optimism. In Portuguese.—*D.D.* (11/30/98) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

The Children of Heaven—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

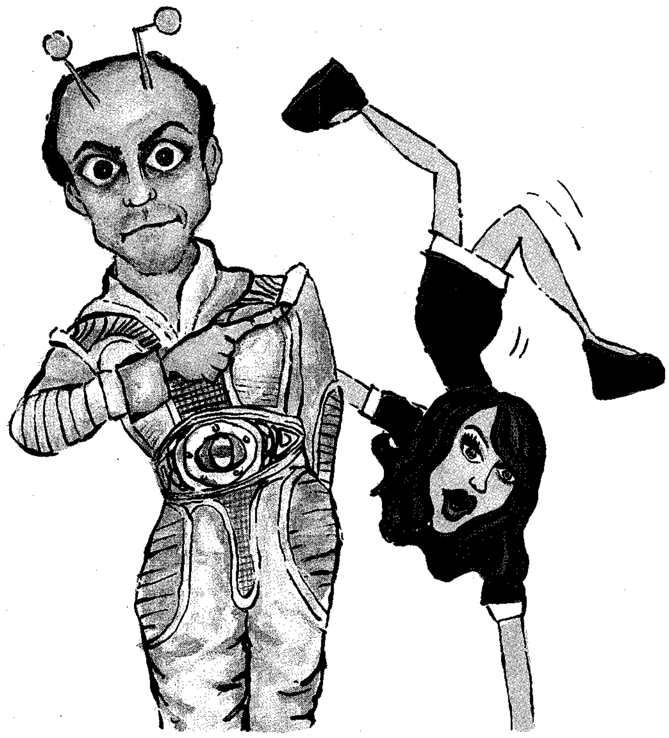
A Civil Action—Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta), a flashy Boston ambulance chaser, gets caught up in a working-class town's battle with two large corporations that may have polluted its water and caused several deaths. Obsessed, Schlichtmann loses his professional judgment and sacrifices everything to the case. That the story is true (and based on an expertly written book by Jonathan Harr) doesn't make the film any more satisfying dramatically—there's a streak of obviousness in the moral melodrama that dampens one's interest. Written and directed by Steven Zaillian.—*D.D.* (1/11/99) (Gotham Cinema, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

Duel in the Sun (1946)—Hilariously florid—sometimes referred to as "Lust in the Dust." This Wagnerian Western features Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones as lovers so passionate they kill each other. She's Pearl Chavez, a half-breed wench, and so by Hollywood convention uncontrollably sexy, and Peck actually manages to bestir himself enough to play a hunk of egotistic hot stuff—maybe the name Lewt McCanles got to him, or maybe the producer, David O. Selznick, used electric prods. Peck clangs his spurs and leers, while Jones tosses her hair and heaves her chest; when they kiss, lightning blazes. Director King Vidor gives much of the spectacle a galloping bravura excitement, and the hokum is irresistibly entertaining. With Walter Huston having a roaring good time as a hellfire preacher, Butterfly McQueen going even further with the character she created in "Gone with the Wind," Joseph Cotten, and Lillian Gish.—*Pauline Kael* (A Different Light Bookstore; Feb. 14. . . . ¶ Museum of Modern Art; Feb. 15.)

Elizabeth—A grisly, flamboyant account of the Virgin Queen's early days as a monarch. Screenwriter Michael Hirst alters and conflates events that took place over many years—by degrees, Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), a Protestant surrounded by powerful Catholics, takes control of England by pulling off a kind of internal coup d'état. The means of her ascension is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a perfect Machiavellian character who serves the Queen as adviser, deadly assassin, and spy. Elizabeth's climb to power, however, is a personal disaster: the supple-waisted maiden with long red hair becomes stiff and harsh, emerging from her youth white-faced and trapped in the armor of a thick brocade dress. The movie is a horror film masquerading as a historical pageant. Directed by Shekhar Kapur.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Gods and Monsters—In the nineteen-fifties, the British-born director James Whale, who had lent depth and dignity to the horror film with "Frankenstein" and "Bride of Frankenstein," idled away his time, all but forgotten by the movie industry, in Pacific Palisades, California; eventually, he drowned in his pool. Bill Condon's elegant and tactful picture, based on Christopher Bram's novel "Father of Frankenstein," speculates on what might have happened in those final days. The inquiry draws fine performances from Ian McKellen as the dandyish Whale and from Brendan Fraser as his (wholly fictitious) gardener, Clayton Boone, with whom the older man becomes obsessed. With Lynn Redgrave as a Puritan housekeeper.—*Anthony Lane* (11/9/98) (59th Street East Cinema, Olympia, and Quad Cinema.)

Hilary and Jackie—Anand Tucker's film takes us through the politely fraught story of the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister Hilary. We see them first as young girls, and follow their rivalry; Hilary, the sensible flutist, is gradually outstripped by her more impassioned sister. The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale, in which the now famous Jackie (Emily Watson) starts up a rural threesome with Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Hilary's husband, Kiffer Finzi (David Morrissey), feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music.—*A.L.* (1/18/99) (BAM



Christopher Lloyd and Elizabeth Hurley in "My Favorite Martian."

ROBERT MELFE

Rose Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Life Is Beautiful—Would that it were. The great, donkey-faced Italian clown Roberto Benigni attempts an ambitious fable of comedy's redemptive power. He plays an Italian Jew who keeps alive his little boy's innocence in a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the routines of the camp are no more than an intricate game staged for his son's benefit. But Benigni's ironic counter-reality undermines this movie, not the Nazis, who were beyond ridicule for the same reason that they were beyond rationality. Totalitarianism makes the fantastic literal—that is its demonic appeal. Benigni's jokes and games just aren't enough, and you leave the movie thinking that what's touching is not Benigni's ministrations to the little boy but his own need to believe in comedy as salvation. With Giorgio Cantarini, who has the heartbreaking quality of the children in the old neorealist movies, as the boy. In Italian.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Lola Montès (1955)—This ambitious phantasmagorical treatment of the scandalous life of the nineteenth-century courtesan and dancer Lola Montès (Martine Carol) is a reflection on the ephemeral nature of fame, beauty, and pleasure. It was the last film completed by Max Ophuls; as he lay dying, his producers were shortening and reëditing his version (it was cut from 140 minutes to 110 to 90—the 110-minute version is being shown here) in the hope of recouping their investment. (The film was shot in CinemaScope and color and was made on an opulent scale.) But even in a restored form, it's disappointing—poorly acted and too shallow for its melancholy tone and its rich décor and elaborate structure. In French.—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Feb. 15-16.)

My Name Is Joe—Joe (Peter Mullan), the hero of Ken Loach's funny and excoriating new movie, starts by announcing that he is on the wagon. This being Loach, you can be fairly certain that Joe will spend the next ninety minutes falling off it again, and, sure enough, he winds up in a foul blur of booze. What comes in between—and, in a terrible way, sets him back on the path of self-destruction—is a love affair. This unemployed Glaswegian meets a health worker called Sarah (Louise Goodall), who appears to offer him a better sort of life. But his old habits and connections die hard, and Mullan's combative, unsentimental performance makes Joe's slow ruin not just credible but unavoidable. Whether the maddened high drama of the climax rings equally true is another matter; Loach's talent for small pleasures and crackling provincial gags has always been more winning than his determination to be a tragedian, let alone a political soothsayer.—*A.L.* (2/1/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

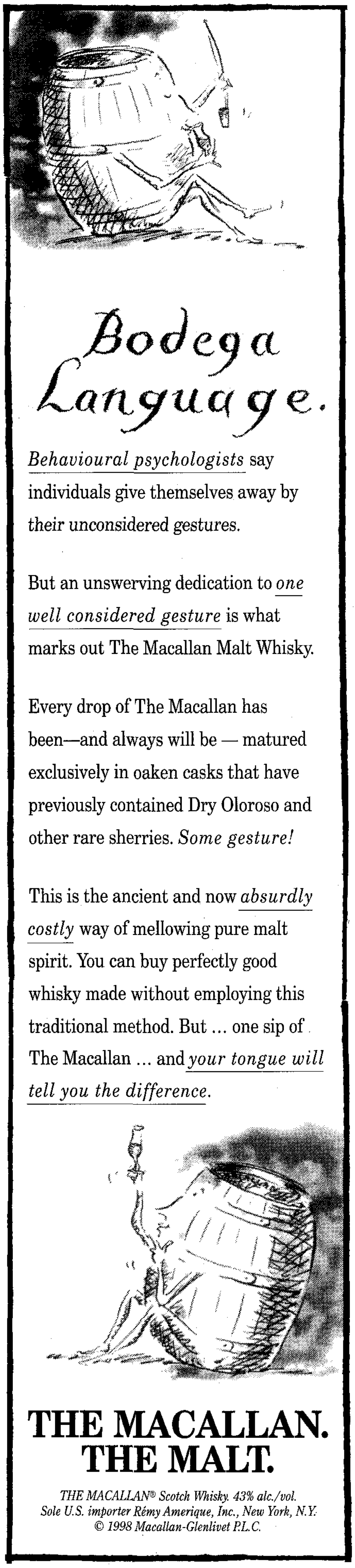
Payback—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Playing by Heart—One of those crowded movies that want to be read like a book of connected short stories. Written and directed by Willard Carroll, who seems a little too proud of his own dialogue, the picture is set in an improbably luscious Los Angeles, where the most pressing problem seems to be the difficulty of finding a date. The cast is split into couples, with the occasional loner: we get Sean Connery and Gena Rowlands as an almost happily married couple, Madeleine Stowe and Anthony Edwards as adulterous lovers, Angelina Jolie and Ryan Phillippe as brightly hued clubbers, Ellen Burstyn and Jay Mohr as mother and son, and Gillian Anderson and Jon Stewart, who would make a nice couple if she weren't so screwed up about it. Finally, there is Dennis Quaid, who wanders around town unloading his grievances on strangers—just the kind of helpless storyteller, one suspects, that Carroll would like to be. The movie adds up all right, but it fails signally in its desire to be more than the sum of its parts. The ending is a cute weave of the narrative strands; we are meant to be surprised by the revelations and charmed by Carroll's sunny suggestion that all is right with the world. His performers—especially Stowe and the breakneck, baby-faced Jolie—deserve better.—*A.L.* (2/1/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 72nd Street East, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Psycho (1960)—When he directed this amazingly effective low-budget thriller in black-and-white with a TV-tested crew, Alfred Hitchcock went after the youthful horror-film audience with a vengeance. Everything from the titillating opening, in which Janet Leigh and John Gavin get dressed after making love during her lunch hour, to the notorious slashing shocks and reversals made the film a rite-of-passage smash. Written by Joseph Stefano from a novel by Robert Bloch, it's a nightmare crystallization of the petit-bourgeois side of Hitchcock's sensibility. No improper thought goes unpunished. All the characters are trapped in stifling circumstances—especially poor Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), the manager of a motel stranded beside a no longer travelled road. (Gus Van Sant made an amateurish color replica last year; in this frame-by-frame reconstruction—give or take a couple of near subliminal flash cuts—the only joke that paid off was that Van Sant, like Norman Bates, seemed to be in love with taxidermy.)—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum 2; starting Feb. 12.)

Rushmore—Wes Anderson's smart, refreshing picture is all about Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), who is in the tenth grade at Rushmore Academy—or, to put it in Max's own terms, in heaven. He runs everything from the school beekeepers to the rather ambitious theatre group; he hangs out with Mr. Blume (Bill Murray), the father of a school friend; and, although his grades are woeful, Max compensates by falling in love with a teacher, Miss Cross (Olivia Williams). All is well until Blume, too, falls in love with Miss Cross; from here on, Max's world starts to come apart at the seams—not that you would know it from his big, blank, bespectacled face. The whole movie marks the triumph of the deadpan; Schwartzman is cautious but stubbornly optimistic, while Murray is possessed by the mania of near-despair, but neither kicks up much of a fuss. They make the best and most disconcerting odd couple that American movies have produced in a long while, and they lightly demolish the social hierarchy: how can Blume be Max's elder and better, when the child is so plainly the father of the man? Anderson finds the ideal comic rhythm for all this—sliding off the beat for a few surreal gags but always kicking back fast into the plot. As a result, what could have been merely arch or wacky turns into something more touching—a mature riff on the absurdity of growing up.—*A.L.* (12/7-14/98) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square.)

Saving Private Ryan—Steven Spielberg's new picture, one of his best, is a sandwich. The meat of the tale concerns a bunch of U.S. Army Rangers who are sent into Normandy to rescue the sole survivor of four brothers. On either side of this bold endeavor you get half an hour of unyielding combat: first, the D Day landings on Omaha Beach and, later, a consummate last stand in which too few Americans try to hold a bridge against too many Germans and too many tanks. Spielberg has arranged his violence into a semblance of pure disorder. The illusion holds, complete with severed limbs and wellsprings of blood, and it feels honorable; Spielberg's preachy movies can be an awful grind, but, apart from a disposable coda, this new work is too swift (and often too inaudible) to weigh you



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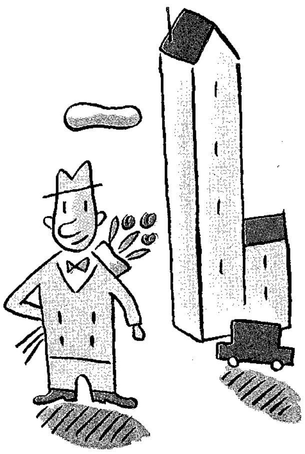
down.—*A.L.* (8/3/98) (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)



PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

THELONIOUS MONK: STRAIGHT, NO CHASER (1989)—Magic and murk blend in this wispy yet haunting profile of an elusive jazz giant. Director Charlotte Zwerin interviews the pianist-composer's managers and collaborators (as well as Thelonious Monk, Jr.) and intercuts their comments with Tommy Flanagan and Barry Harris's dual-piano performances of his work and with remarkable black-and-white footage of Monk in 1967 and 1968, filmed by Christian Blackwood. You expect an exploratory biography, but Zwerin can't find a way into the mystery of this manic-depressive master of bebop. And no wonder. Monk speaks either tersely or elliptically; whether pacing angrily or twirling like a sleepwalker, he's a difficult moving target. Still, the film is full of fascinations, thanks mostly to Blackwood's record of this bearlike man improvising like crazy on a European tour, conjuring radical melodies and rhythms from some deep sanctum of his being.—*M.S.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Feb. 14.)

THE THIN RED LINE—Terrence Malick's first film in twenty years is about a company of American troops at Guadalcanal. What happens, in essence, is that they come ashore and take an enemy-held hill; somehow, Malick, who was never a man to be hurried, spins this simple action out to nearly three hours. The cast includes Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Elias Koteas, John Savage, Woody Harrelson, George Clooney, and John Travolta, with strong performances from younger actors like Ben Chaplin and Jim Caviezel, but they all drift in and out of the action, never staying long enough to hold center stage. Malick seems to like his characters lonely—they talk to themselves in voice-over but rarely connect with other men. The result is a ravishingly strange mess: part bloody action movie, part pantheistic trip.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE (reviewed in our issue of 1/25/99): Angelika Film Center. . . . **AT FIRST SIGHT:** Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THE CELEBRATION:** Eastside Playhouse and The Screening Room. . . . **DOWN IN THE DELTA:** BAM Rose Cinemas. . . . **DRY CLEANING:** Quad Cinema. . . . **ENEMY OF THE STATE:** Criterion Center, Sutton, and Union Square. . . . **THE GENERAL** (12/21/98): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **GLORIA:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, and 64th and 2nd. . . . **HANDS ON A HARD BODY:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **HAPPINESS** (10/19/98): Murray Hill Cinemas and Village East Cinemas. . . . **HURLYBURLY:** Angelika Film Center and Chelsea Cinemas. . . . **IN DREAMS:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THE LAST DAYS:** 62nd & Broadway. . . . **LITTLE VOICE:** Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, and Union Square. . . . **PATCH ADAMS** (1/25/99): Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square. . . . **PIZZICATA:** Film Forum. . . . **SHE'S ALL THAT:** Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, State, and Union Square. . . . **A SIMPLE PLAN:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE:** Lincoln Square and Park & 86th Street Cinemas. . . . **STEAM: THE TURKISH BATH:** Quad Cinema. . . . **STEPMOM** (12/28/98 & 1/4/99): Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **STILL CRAZY:** Union Square. . . . **THE 24 HOUR WOMAN:** Union Square. . . . **VARSITY BLUES:** East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **WAKING NED DEVINE:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, and Union Square. . . . **YOU'VE GOT MAIL** (12/28/98 & 1/4/99): Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Feb. 11: "Peeping Tom" (1960, Michael Powell). . . . From Feb. 12: "Psycho" (†).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Feb. 11 and Feb. 16 at 2:30: "Fitzcarraldo" (1982, Werner Herzog; in German). . . . Feb. 11 at 6 and Feb. 12 at 2:30: "Apocalypse Now" (1979, Francis Ford Coppola). . . . Feb. 11 at 6: One program in a series about the history of 8-mm. film and video in the United States. . . . Feb. 11 at 6:30 and Feb. 12 at 3: "The Betrayed" (1995, Clive Gordon). . . . Feb. 12 at 6 and 8; Feb. 13 at 1:30, 4, and 5:30; Feb. 14 at 1 and 3; and Feb. 15 at 1, 3, and 5: Ten different programs in a series of British documentary short films. . . . Feb. 12 at 7: "I Am Cuba" (1964, Mikhail Kalatozov; in Russian). . . . Feb. 13 at 1:15: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent). . . . Feb. 13 at 5: "Greed" (1924, Erich von Stroheim; silent). . . . Feb. 14 at 2: "Metropolis" (1926, Fritz Lang; silent). . . . Feb. 14 at 5: "I'Inhumaine" (1924, Marcel L'Herbier; a French silent film, with French intertitles). . . . Feb. 15 at 2:30 and Feb. 16 at 6: "Lola Montès" (†). . . . Feb. 15 at 6: "Duel in the Sun" (†).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films from Cuba; in Spanish, with English subtitles. Feb. 10 at 2 and 6:15 and Feb. 11 at 3:50: "Now It's Up to You" (1974, Manuel Octavio Gómez). . . . Feb. 10 at 4:15 and 8:20 and Feb. 12 at 2: "One Way or Another" (1974, Sara Gomez). . . . Feb. 12 at 2 and 6:15 and Feb. 13 at 4: "The Other Francisco" (1975, Sergio Giral). . . . Feb. 12 at 4 and 8:15 and Feb. 13 at 6: "Slave Hunter" (1976, Giral). . . . Feb. 13 at 8 and Feb. 15 at 4:20: "Maluala" (1979, Giral). . . . Feb. 15 at 2 and 6:15: "The Last Supper" (1977, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea). . . . Feb. 15 at 8:35 and Feb. 16 at 2: "Rio Negro" (1977, Manuel Pérez). . . . ¶ Feb. 13 at 2: "Wind in the Willows" (1997, Terry Jones). . . . ¶ Feb. 14 at 7: "Les Amants du Pont-Neuf" (1991, Leos Carax; in French).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Feb. 13 at 2: "Duke Ellington: Reminiscing in Tempo" (1992, Robert Levi). . . . Feb. 13 at 5: "Jivin' in Be-Bop" (1946, Leonard Alexander and Spencer Williams) and "Look Out Sister" (1947, Bud Pollard). . . . Feb. 14 at 2: A program of short animated films, all featuring jazz. . . . Feb. 14 at 4:30: "Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser" (†).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Feb. 16 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Western" (1997, Manuel Poirier; in French).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Feb. 14 at 7, the feature will be "Duel in the Sun" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—A program of films by Jean-Luc Godard. Feb. 11 at 7, Feb. 12 at 9, and Feb. 14 at 4: "Every Man for Himself" (1980). . . . Feb. 11 at 9, Feb. 13 at 7, and Feb. 14 at 6: "First Name: Carmen" (1983). . . . Feb. 12 at 7, Feb. 13 at 9, and Feb. 14 at 8: "Hail Mary" (1985).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—"Fantastic Planet" (1973, René Laloux; in French).

Cantor Film Center, 36 E. 8th St. (677-6478)—Through Feb. 13: The 1999 New York International Children's Film Festival.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-623-2770.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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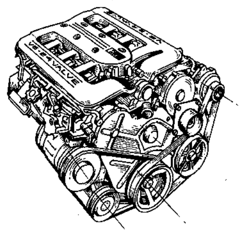
Sometimes you forget the store altogether.



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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

More bad news from the Gulag.

A Russian general named Vladimir Yalunin arrived here last week in a curious mood. A stout, frank man in his late forties, Yalunin has a job with a hideous legacy: he is the head of the Gulag, the warden-in-chief of the Russian penal system. Like many Russian bureaucrats who have come through town in the past decade, Yalunin availed himself of some rich meals and an admiring glance or two at New York in all its Gilded Age self-satisfaction, but he didn't make a big deal out of it. That would have been unseemly. Russia is enduring a post-imperial crisis of almost unimaginable dimensions—economic free fall, rampant corruption, military collapse, political chaos, you name it—and Yalunin is lord of the most decayed sector of all. If the prospect of "loose" nuclear and chemical weapons is Russia's main threat to international stability, its prisons are one of the deepest threats to its internal well-being. Yalunin was interested in checking out conditions at Rikers Island, which he expected would resemble a complex of suites in a swank hotel by comparison, but his real mission was to call attention to the desperate circumstances in Russian prisons. "The story I have to tell," he said over breakfast the morning after his arrival from Moscow, "is not so very good."

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It is quite possible that since 1991 the only realm in which Russia has been able to sustain a Cold War parity with the United States is that of its incarcerated population. There are two hundred and seventy-five thousand Russians in detention centers awaiting trial and more than seven hundred thousand in prisons and labor colonies. "By percentage, about the same as you, except that you spend about seventy dollars per day per prisoner and we spend one dollar per day per prisoner," Yalunin said. "It's very hard to explain to you what a prisoner gets for his one dollar."

As the sclerotic government struggles under the burden of a hundred-and-fifty-billion-dollar foreign debt and a teetering infrastructure, prison budgets get slashed every year. Yalunin estimates that he now gets about half of what is needed for bare subsistence. Holding cells built for ten men routinely house thirty or more; prisoners sleep in shifts; many cells barely have room for prisoners to stand up, much less sit down. "Every prisoner in the system is malnourished," Yalunin said. Western human-rights groups and United Nations monitors frequently report cases of violence, prisoner abuse, and even torture.

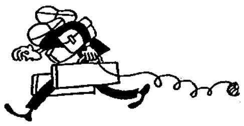
The urgency of Yalunin's trip, however, is more specific. Overcrowding and filth are so common and medical care is so scarce that prison cells have become incubators for infectious disease. Most seriously, the entire prison population is now at risk from various strains of multi-drug-resistant t.b. (MDR t.b.). These strains occur when ordinary t.b. is inadequately treated; t.b. cases in Russian jails are nearly always ill-treated, if they are treated at all. As infected convicts are released, according to the New York Public Health Research Institute, MDR t.b. is likely to become a nationwide epidemic. (New York endured an outbreak in the early nineties, spending a billion dollars to control two thousand cases.) In Russia today there are as many as a hundred thousand cases, nearly seventy-five per cent of them in prisons.

The health problem in Russian prisons is a gruesome and fairly apt symbol of the Russian problem in general. Living conditions, except for the wealthy few in Moscow, are wretched and getting worse. And who really cares? In an era in which America's attention is divided between unprecedented economic success and unprecedented political absurdity, Russia is ignored as just too broken to fix. Typically, Yalunin's fact-finding trip is funded not by the United States government but, rather, by George Soros, through the Public Health Research Institute.

Having invested trillions of dollars in the Cold War, the West now spends a fraction of that amount in Russia to contain weapons stockpiles, to feed the hungry, to stanch epidemics, and, generally, to insure that the postimperial state does not become more dangerous than the imperial one—to itself and to the world. Not so long ago, we would all have been happily amazed that the Russian warden had come to Manhattan, the ultimate fish-out-of-water story: "GULAG CHIEF WINDOW-SHOPS ON FIFTH." Now the General comes just hoping that someone—anyone—will pay attention. —DAVID REMNICK

TIGHT SQUEEZE DEPT.

A New York designer demonstrates how to be a better pack rat.



A small group of New Yorkers have been talking about some cool new installations lately. Clear-glass boxes with aluminum trim along their edges, they stand in the lobbies of three facilities operated by Manhattan Mini Storage, until now one of the most utilitarian of New York institutions. The company calls the installations "visible closets," but actually they are model storage spaces. They are stuffed to capacity with the sorts of things New Yorkers feel compelled to keep, the kadima paddles and tax records and outgrown children's clothes that no one wants to see crowding a cramped apartment. But instead of being smooshed and jumbled inside the cubes, the way things tend to be in the closets of Manhattan, these items have been attractively arranged and neatly labelled. Coats and dresses hang primly on rods. Clearly, a professional stylist has been at work.

Nancy Arons, who is a set designer for television commercials, was hired by Manhattan Mini Storage to show would-be customers just how much a four-by-four-by-five-foot cubicle could hold. "I'm also a tenant here, so I do know how to make these spaces stretch," Arons said last week. The closets were part of a plan developed by Neal Eisenstein, the company's vice-president of sales and marketing. "The vast majority of customers, they just cram stuff in, and rightly so," he said the other day at the Spring Street storage facility. "But we really didn't want to do that. We wanted to create a vision. We see ourselves as the Nordstrom of self-storage."

As sleek in design as pieces of minimalist furniture, and with interiors that have the eerily beautiful quality of a time capsule, the cubes bring to mind an artistic collision between Donald Judd and Ed Kienholz. "They are sculptures, essentially," Arons said. "They have to work aesthetically on all four sides." She also compares them to Rubik's cubes: "When Neal asked me to change one thing in the back, I had to take everything out."

Of course, this isn't art. It's marketing. Manhattan Mini wanted to speak to the different clienteles of each of its three facilities, so Arons assembled three sets of demographically appropriate junk, concocting pretend clients to guide her. At the Manhattan Mini

PERSONAL HISTORY

MY UNFUNNY VALENTINE

BY SALMAN RUSHDIE

Yes, all right, on February 14th it will be ten years since I received my unfunny valentine. I admit to a dilemma. Ignore the politics (which I'd love to do), and my silence must look enforced or fearful. Speak, and I risk deafening the world to those other utterances, my books, written in my true language, the language of literature. I risk helping to conceal the real Salman behind the smoky, sulfurous Rushdie of the Affair.

I have two lives: one blighted by hatred and caught up in a dire business that, alas, is not yet done, and another in which I love and am loved, the life of a free man, freely doing his work. Two lives, but none I can afford to lose, for one loss would end both.

So I'll have my say, and because everybody loves an anniversary no doubt much will be said elsewhere by the armies of bigotry and punditry. Let them volley and thunder. I'll speak of bookish things.

When asked about the effect on my writing of the ten-year-long assault upon it, I've answered lightheartedly that I've become more interested in happy endings; and that, as I've been told that my recent books are my funniest, the attacks have evidently improved my sense of humor. These answers, true enough in their way, are designed to deflect deeper inquiry.

How to explain to strangers my sense of violation? It's as if men wielding clubs were to burst loudly into your home and lay it waste. They arrive when you're making love, or standing naked in the shower, or sitting on the toilet, or staring in deep inward silence at the lines you've scrawled on a page. Never again will you kiss or bathe or write or shit without remembering this intrusion. And yet to do these things pleasurably and well you must shut out the memory—Never!—but you must.

And how to describe the damage? As

a spear in the stomach which somehow doesn't kill but turns and twists. As a heaviness. As something remembered from boarding-school childhood: I wake and, lying in bed, find I can't move. My arms, legs, and head have grown impossibly weighty. Nobody believes me, of course, and all the children laugh.

I can't go on, says Beckett's Unnamable, I'll go on. A writer's injuries are his strengths, and from his wounds will flow his sweetest, most startling dreams.

Amid the cacophony of the professionally opinionated and the professionally offended, may a voice still be heard celebrating literature, highest of arts, its passionate, dispassionate inquiry into life on earth, its naked journey across the frontierless human terrain, its fierce-minded rebuke to dogma and power, and its trespasser's fearless daring?

In these years, I've met and been inspired by some of the world's bravest fighters for literary freedom. I took part recently in the ceremony of dedication of a house for refugee writers in Mexico City (more than twenty cities already belong to this scheme) and was proud to be doing a little to ease the struggles of others who are in danger from intolerance. But as well as fighting the fight, which I will surely go on doing, I have grown determined to prove that the art of literature is more resilient than what menaces it. The best defense of literary freedoms lies in their exercise, in continuing to make untrammelled, uncowed books. So, beyond grief, bewilderment, and despair, I have rededicated myself to our high calling.

I am conscious of shifts in my writing. There was always a tug-of-war in me between "there" and "here," the pull of roots and the dream of leaving. In that struggle of insiders and outsiders, I used to feel simultaneously on both sides. Now I've come down firmly on the side of those who by preference, nature, or circumstance simply do not belong. This unbelonging—I think of it as disorientation, loss of the East—is my artistic country now. Wherever my books find themselves—by a favored armchair, near a hot bath, on a beach, or in a late-night pool of bedside light—that's my home.

Life can be harsh, and for a decade St. Valentine's Day has reminded me of that harshness. But these dark anniversaries of the appalling valentine I was sent in 1989 have also been times to reflect upon the countervailing value of love. Love feels more and more like the only subject. At the center of my life, of my new work, of my future plans, I now find nothing else.

The remains of St. Valentine himself (or at least one set of his remains) are to come out of hiding. Instead of the cardboard box in which they were ignominiously stored for years, they will have a reliquary in Glasgow's notably unfluffy, roughneck Gorbals district. I like this image: the patron saint of romance discovers the gritty verities of life in the real world, while that world is enriched in turn by the flowering, in its mean streets, of love. ♦

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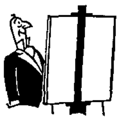
on West Forty-fourth Street, in Hell's Kitchen, an imaginary working-class couple store a pair of bowling balls and an infant's car seat. On Spring Street, a self-employed man and woman—"creative types," according to Eisenstein—keep bubble-wrapped vases marked "flea market" and boxes with the words "old scripts" scrawled across them. "We'd never do that at East Sixty-second Street," Eisenstein said. There the belongings (golf clubs, little girls' party dresses) befit a more traditional 10021 family. "We tried to go a little upscale in terms of the clothing," he said. "Nancy reminded me to show the Ungaro outfit prominently."

Eisenstein and Arons did experience some creative differences. Arons didn't want to completely fill each cube. "She wanted to make it more airy, so people could say, 'Oh great, I could add more things here,' " Eisenstein explained. "I told her, 'That's not my vision. My vision is to decorate them just to the point where most of the available space is used, to give people the sense of what the solution could be for them.' " Eisenstein and Arons also clashed over color schemes. "We wanted to make it colorful and eye-appealing," Eisenstein said. He vetoed the stylist's idea of displaying a typical New Yorker's basic black and gray wardrobe. —DEGEN PENER

POSTSCRIPT

The art works that Paul Mellon couldn't part with.



WHEN Paul Mellon died, last week, at the age of ninety-one, he was at his home in Upperville, Virginia. As always, he was surrounded by art. Two Junes ago, he celebrated his ninetieth birthday with a lunch for thirty friends at the Brick House, the private museum that he kept on his property. In honor of that occasion, he did something that he did about once a week anyway: he walked around and looked at the cache of pictures that he had not yet given away to museums. Though almost all of his remaining treasures had been signed over to one institution or another, he was not yet ready to deliver them. "I don't want them to go—they can wait for these," he said. Stop No. 1 was in the living room, in front of a pink-and-blue Stubbs: "Pumpkin with a Stable Lad." It was his first purchase, and just what a young man with five thousand dollars in his pocket in 1936 would buy if he loved English landscape and country life, and horses. "It has been with me all this time," Mellon said, with more feeling than he usually allowed himself to show. Mellon was twenty-nine when he bought this painting, and didn't know that he was going to be one of the great collectors of the century. "So much of the time, I was continually thinking I was something I wasn't—a scholar, or a teacher," he recalled. "Anything to avoid the Mellon Bank."

After lunch, where each place was set with a gold plate won by a Mellon horse, we were shown the bookcases where William Blake's illuminated books—twelve of them—were shelved before they were donated to the Yale Center for British Art. (According to Patrick Noon, who curated a recent Blake exhibit there, Mellon pored over the show for hours before asking, "Why did I give you all this?") Blake is an anomaly in Mellon's collection, but the mystic poet was his second enthusiasm in British art, after Stubbs. He connected Blake's imaginative heights with the idea of the collective unconscious put forth by Carl Jung, his onetime analyst.

We finished the Brick House pilgrimage in the upstairs hall, in a narrow gallery designed by Mellon's second wife, Rachel Lambert Lloyd, who was known as Bunny. Thirty-two small waxes of horses and dancers modelled by Degas (you can see his fingerprints) were installed against the walls by the Mellon family. (They used to hang all their pictures themselves, even banging in the nails, which is a bit like Louis XIV hanging the mirrors at Versailles.) On the end wall is Degas's 1866 "Steeplechase—The Fallen Jockey." Congested, dark and dangerous, the painting shows horses' hooves crashing and a jockey crumpled on the ground in pink silks. "Not something that you'd have sitting around the living room," Mellon observed.

"Things that people write about art are nonsense," Mellon said with just the faintest asperity. "My favorite book about art is Tom Wolfe's 'The Painted Word.' " The closest Mellon ever came to publicly expressing his views about the power of art was when he told a 1964 high-school graduating class that what this country needed was "a good five-cent reverie." If Paul Mellon never particularly wanted to talk about why he bought his pictures, there are plenty of bystanders who are ready to characterize his collecting habit. Among them is John Richardson, the Picasso biographer and a reliable purveyor of art gossip. "He's unlike other great American patrons of this century," Richardson told me. "Unlike Norton Simon, who was a sort of pirate, a racketeer. Or the Rockefellers, laundering their robber-baron guilt away with tax-free donations." Then Richardson launched into a list of the seven deadly sins that Mellon never committed: pride (putting your name on everything); covetousness (collecting as an investment); lust—but there he broke off, admitting that, for a collector, it is vital.

After the birthday party, Mellon drove his 1968 blue Mercedes back to the other house on the place, Oak Spring, where he and Bunny lived for more than fifty years. There's a Pissarro in the guest bath, and quantities of other French paintings that hadn't been given away yet. He told a favorite family story: When a fourteen-year-old classmate of Eliza Lloyd, Bunny's daughter, came to Sunday lunch, she took in the paintings everywhere, looked at van Gogh's turbulent "Green Wheat Fields, Auvers," and asked, "Who paints?" "Nobody here," Eliza said. "Da buys them at the store." Mellon looked at "Green Wheat Fields" and said, "For me, the story is a gentle put-down for those of us who worship art too much." —Mac Griswold

INK

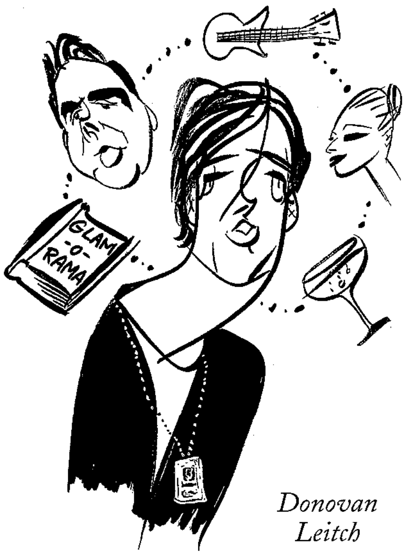
An actor-model-musician-promoter who also wants to be a muse.

Look closely at the hundred and sixty-six tiny celebrity head shots on the cover of Bret Easton Ellis's new novel, "Glamorama," and you will notice that pride of place has been given to Donovan Leitch, Manhattan's perennial "It" boy. This is not a coincidence, according to the model, singer, actor, and occasional night-club promoter, whose struggling glam-rock revival band, Nancy Boy, is in negotiations for a recording contract with Disney's Mammoth Records. "That novel is basically based on my life," Leitch said the other night at an après-ski theme party he was hosting at B Bar. "I used to know Bret, sort of. I talked to him a couple of years ago, and he said, 'I'm writing a character for a novel and the picture I have in my head of him is you.' " And according to Kirsty Hume, Leitch's supermodel wife, "When Bret gave Donovan the book, he said it was kind of based on Donovan."

"Glamorama" relates the unfortunate adventures of Victor Ward, a "quasi-famous" male model who dates a very famous supermodel. In Ward, Ellis has created a character who is as reliable a fixture on the Manhattan club scene as . . . well, as Donovan Leitch. Like Ward, Leitch plays in a struggling rock band, has appeared in Calvin Klein ads, and has dated supermodels. Like Leitch, who appeared in the 1988 remake of "The Blob," Ward finds himself up for a part in a cheesy horror movie. Also like Leitch, Ward has a father who is something of a celebrity himself, though he is a United States senator with designs on the Presidency, rather than a peace-loving nineteen-sixties pop icon with a bowl haircut.

Ellis, speaking by telephone between stops on his book tour for "Glamorama," was surprised and a bit amused to hear that Leitch had claimed such close kinship with his protagonist. "Victor Ward is a total figment, a total summation of all the things that I found very annoying about men of my generation, and he really wasn't based on anyone that I know," Ellis said. "I started writing this book before I even knew who Donovan Leitch was."

Still, Ellis conceded that "all the stuff going on in celebrity culture" fuelled the writing of "Glamorama." "I wouldn't be surprised if maybe unconsciously I kept flashing on Donovan Leitch during the creation of this book," he said. Leitch and Hume do have cameo roles in the novel (along with hundreds of other celebrities and demi-celebrities, and "someone named Susan Sontag"), appearing as themselves in a Todd Oldham fashion show.



Donovan Leitch

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM BACHTELL

When Leitch was told of Ellis's denials, he amiably went along with the author's subliminal-suggestion theory. "I think I was just fitted into the scheme somewhere," he said. "I don't know if there's another male model out there who has all the same character traits that I have." For Leitch, even the book's later chapters, in which Victor Ward falls in with a pack of models turned terrorists, resonated. "The similarities between being a terrorist and being a male model are not that dissimilar, you know. It's like a certain pose, and you're sort of distant from your career and you're just sort of apathetic in a way."

Fortunately for Leitch, his life has yet to take the Grand Guignol turn that Victor Ward's takes in "Glamorama." He and Hume are planning to move out of Manhattan, to Woodstock, where he will concentrate on composing and recording his album. These days, Leitch admits, "life is not as glam as it used to be. But when we come out with the new record and everything, we'll get back into it." —MARK WALLACE

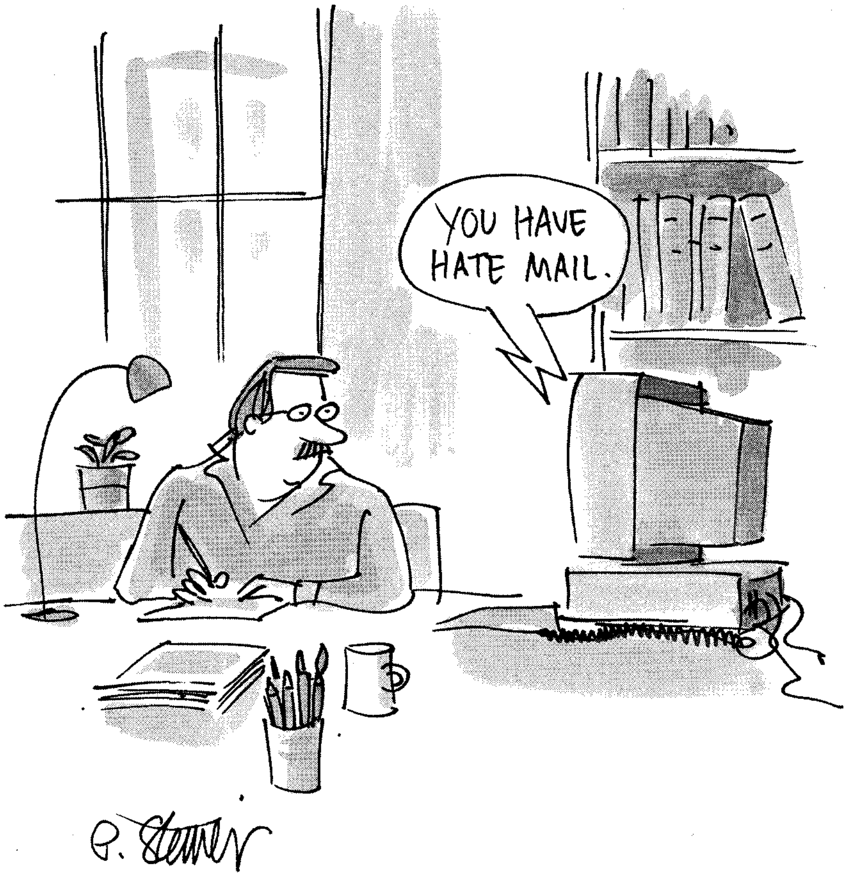
AT THE MUSEUMS

An art-world mega-merger that has nothing to do with money.

LAST week's announcement that the Museum of Modern Art and the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center had agreed to join forces came as a huge surprise to almost everybody. Top staff people and a few key board members at both institutions were in on it, of course, but the art world's rumor-meisters didn't have a clue. Alanna Heiss, P.S. 1's irrepressible founder and director, who took over an abandoned public school in Long Island City in 1976 and turned it into one of the world's preëminent exhibition spaces for contemporary art, has had a terrible struggle keeping quiet. "I only told my mother," she said last week, proudly. "Whenever I got the urge to tell somebody else, I called her instead. The night before we went public, I couldn't sleep. I finally got up and watched 'Gunsmoke.' I couldn't call Mother because it was three in the morning."

The merger idea grew out of conversations between Heiss and Glenn D. Lowry, who started coming to shows at P.S. 1 soon after he became director of the Museum of Modern Art, in 1995. "We began talking," Heiss recalls. "I liked the man. He has a lively imagination and a very good mind, and he seemed truly committed to art. The suggestion that maybe we could work together—who knows who said it first?" As the talks between Lowry and Heiss developed into full-scale negotiations, it was clear that MOMA wanted P.S. 1 to keep doing exactly what it had done for the last twenty-five years: putting on innovative shows, performances, videos, and installations by young or not so young artists, offering studio space for modest rentals, and building audiences for its extremely innovative programs. P.S. 1 would retain its own staff and structure but would gain access to MOMA's marketing, membership, and publishing operations, and it would also receive help in fund-raising. For MOMA, a primary incentive was that the merger would demolish, once and for all, the persistent criticism that the museum does not do enough for contemporary art. Yoshio Taniguchi's winning design for the expansion and renovation of the museum's building, on Fifty-third Street, will provide a significant increase in the space allotted to recent art, to be sure, but "P.S. 1 does things that we just don't do," as Agnes Gund, MOMA's president, put it last week. "We certainly are not going to go and do a mini-MOMA over there," Ms. Gund went on to say, "and paint everything stark white, but I would love to see some of our big sculptures at P.S. 1, things people haven't seen since we bought them." For example, there's Richard Serra's one-hundred-and-twenty-thousand-pound "Intersection II," a Cor-Ten-steel behemoth that the museum has had since 1993 and has never shown, and an untitled piece by Martin Puryear which was donated in 1997 by Ms. Gund, and was displayed briefly in the lobby at MOMA before being consigned to storage.

City Hall, which owns P.S. 1's building and pays a major share of its operating costs, has taken an active and enthusiastic role in the negotiation. The participants have sixty days to work out the details of the agreement, but in the meanwhile euphoria reigns. Much is being made of the new "cultural corridor" linking MOMA and P.S. 1—only two stops apart on the E and F subway lines—and Alanna Heiss has finally had some sleep. "I tend to live each day like the art addict I am," she said, "but I'm really trying to think long-term. One of the great things is that there's nothing about money in this merger. It's about art and dreams—and P.S. 1 is very strong in art and dreams." —CALVIN TOMKINS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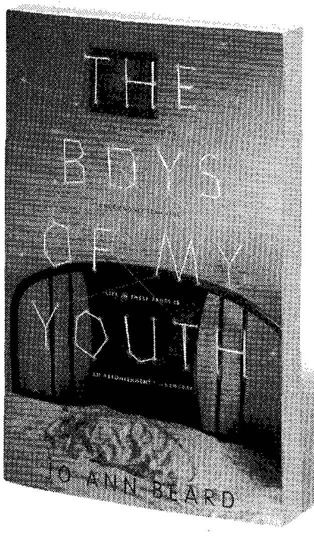

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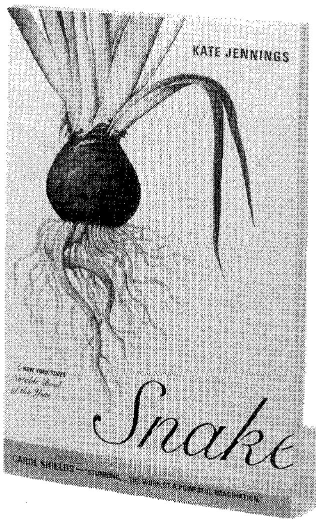

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BACK BAY BOOKS

LETTER FROM WARSAW

HELENA'S KITCHEN

Eighteen years ago, Helena Luczywo was a revolutionary. Now she's about to become one of Eastern Europe's most powerful media moguls.

BY TIMOTHY GARTON ASH

ONE gloomy autumn afternoon in 1980, a pale, short, slightly built woman, with untidy brown hair and intense gray-green eyes, greeted me at the door of her small apartment in one of the ugly new housing projects that the communist regime had thrown up around Warsaw. I was in Poland to witness the workers' revolution led by the Solidarity movement, the greatest challenge to the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe since its creation, at the end of the Second World War, and I had been told that Helena Luczywo would be a good source. Inside, her tiny kitchen, cloudy with cigarette smoke, was packed with people arguing, gesticulating, laughing, pausing only for rapid sips of tea, drunk from glass mugs. In the living room, someone was laying out the next edition of a samizdat magazine called *Robotnik* (*Worker*), while a real, live worker from Gdansk, birthplace of Solidarity, held forth in a corner. In another corner sat a pretty seven-year-old, Lucja, Helena's daughter. The phone was ringing—it seemed always to be ringing—and Helena picked it up, shouted into it, talked to me, took a drag on her cigarette, and giggled, all at the same time. Life in this crowded apartment was obviously being lived at a mad tempo. Partly this was because there was a revolution on, and at any minute Russian tanks might roll across Poland's eastern frontier. But mainly it was because this place was, well, Helena's.

I visited Helena's kitchen many times during the revolution, until, in December, 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in order to crush Solidarity. Then the authorities made it difficult for me to reënter the country. But whenever I could get a visa I headed straight for Helena's: not telephoning beforehand, for fear of alerting the secret police, just turning up at the door. Poland was a police state again, and Helena was now running an underground paper covertly distributed among Solidarity members and supporters. Our conversations in the kitchen were interrupted by her colleagues—wan, intense women, dashing in with news of some crisis. But now, rather than shouting, they scribbled their messages on scraps of paper. Then they burned the scraps in a candle flame while chattering loudly about something else, for the benefit of hidden police microphones.

Helena and I became firm friends, but I would never have imagined the development that has led me to write about her now. Today, Helena is the key figure behind the most successful newspaper in post-communist Europe. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Electoral Paper*), of which she is deputy editor and an executive board member, sells more than half a million copies on weekdays and an additional two hundred thousand at the weekend. On its own custom-built web-offset presses, it prints a full-color weekly magazine, a television guide, eighteen local sections, and book, property, car, job, and computer supplements, plus acres of highly lucrative advertising. It employs more than twenty-four hundred people. Its parent company, Agora, has invested in radio stations and satellite television. This is a multimedia giant in the making, a Polish multimedia giant. And a hugely profitable one: so profitable that it is about to go public. Advised by Credit Suisse First Boston, Agora will soon be making an initial offering on the Warsaw and London stock exchanges. Later this month, its senior managers will be wooing investors in a road show through Europe and the United States. Estimates put its value between three hundred million and more than half a billion dollars. Suddenly, my old friend

Helena is a very powerful woman. She is about to be a rich one, too.

I once described Helena as Solidarity's Rosa Luxemburg. I'm Margaret Thatcher now, she says. Photograph by Witold Krassowski.

NETWORK/SABA

The *Electoral*, as most people call it, has a distinctive style—sometimes abrasive, often sarcastic, always irreverent. The political line laid down by its editor-in-chief, the charismatic former dissident Adam Michnik, is a source of constant and even venomous controversy. The nationalist right attacks the paper for being part of a conspiracy—a Jewish-ex-Bolshevik-capitalist conspiracy, you understand—that is sapping the moral fibre of a nation in which to be Polish is to be Catholic. Others, such as *Trybuna*, the paper of the former communists, denounce "Adam Michnik's media cartel," screaming "Agora builds an empire!" *Trybuna* has called for the company's radio and television interests to be referred to Poland's Anti-Monopoly Office—an ironic demand from what was once the central organ of the communist party.

I don't like everything about the new paper. But I do like the way it upends Western clichés about Poland as a nation of tall, drunken, bragging, mustachioed, male-chauvinist, anti-Semitic noblemen, making doomed cavalry charges against tanks. Or the old German gibe about *polnische Wirtschaft*, which implies that "Polish economy" is a contradiction in terms. Or another cliché—meant to characterize the whole of post-communist Europe—which has former communist apparatchiks raking in the millions while embittered former dissidents sit in freezing attics, wrapped in nothing but a blanket of woolly memories. The truth is that Poland is rapidly building a normal consumer democracy, with a burgeoning middle class and one of the highest growth rates in Europe. It has started negotiations to enter the European Union and will join NATO this spring. And near the heart of the Polish miracle is this hugely successful paper run by ebullient former dissidents, several of them Jewish and many of them women.

HOW do you write about a person who has become a close friend? Helena and I had our first formal "interview" a year and a half ago, seated in a quiet, modern conference room in the paper's Warsaw offices, chatting over the Polish version of a light executive lunch—thick soup, followed by meat and potatoes. We both laughed at our predicament. There were so many basic things I didn't know. For example, when and where was she born?

During the first winter after the war, in Warsaw. Her father, Ferdynand Chaber, the son of wealthy Jewish wine merchants, had become a communist during the nineteen-twenties, spent the war in Russia, and returned after the Polish communists came to power on the back of Russian tanks. He worked in the propaganda department of the new ruling party. The detail suggests an obvious conceit ("from the father's communist propaganda to the daughter's battle against communist propaganda"), one that Helena resists fiercely. Her mother, she said, had been a more influential figure in her life. Dorota Guter, from a Jewish family of small traders, was a model of industry, discipline, commitment, and deep Polish patriotism. She earned a university degree in law; when the Germans invaded, she, like her husband, fled to Russia, where she got a second degree, in engineering. On their return, she reared two children while holding a job as a senior engineer at a car factory near Warsaw. At the same time—and this is so important—this determined Jewish mother was deeply immersed in the Polish Romantic tradition, represented by poets such as Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish Byron.

Helena was brought up to think of herself as simply Polish. But that proved to be difficult. In 1968, while she was a student at Warsaw University, she experienced firsthand a revolting anti-Semitic campaign orchestrated by communist leaders. Week after week, the communist press was full of tirades against "rootless cosmopolitans," parasites on the Polish nation. Polish Jews were denounced as a "gallery of traitors," as "agents of international imperialism," and as "Zionist lackeys." When Warsaw students protested, some of them were beaten up and others—like Michnik—were imprisoned. In the aftermath, most of Poland's surviving Jews (few enough already) left the country, and those who remained have been marked for life. Yet the experience also shaped the generation of Polish '68ers, both Jewish and non-Jewish activists, so similar in some ways to Western '68ers (informal dress and alternative life style; much drink, sex), so different in other, more important ways. Many came to revere an older generation of fighters against communism (whom their Western counterparts tended to abhor), and, while immunized against utopian politics, found ideals worth suffering and dying for.

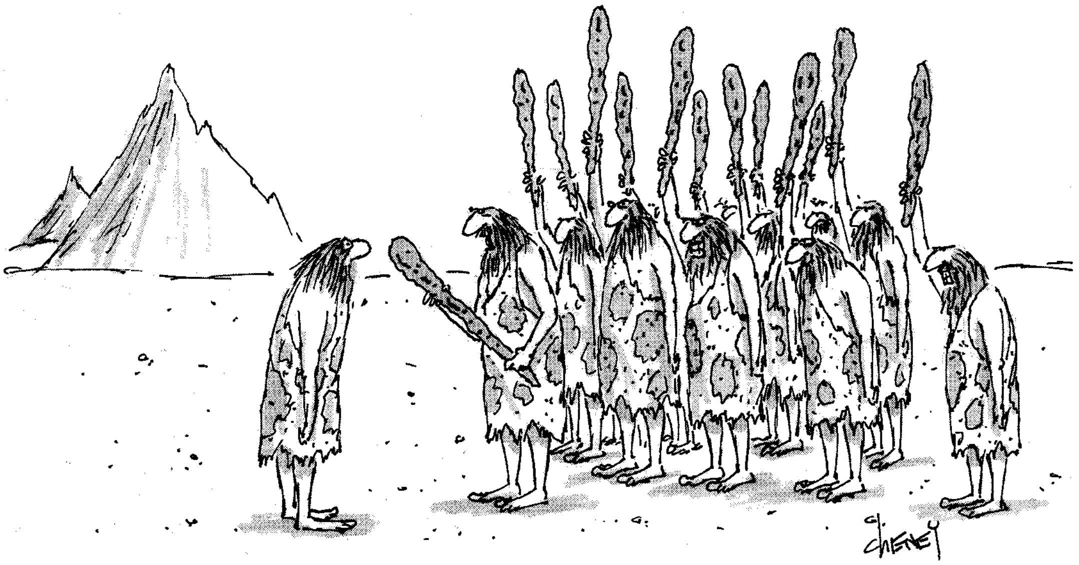
Helena's own personal moment of truth came later. She went on to complete her degree, worked in a bank, got married to a bearded engineer named Witold, and gave birth to Lucja. Then she went back to Warsaw University to study English, intending to become a translator and an interpreter. Set fair, it seemed, for an ordinary, nonpolitical life. But in the summer of 1976 a message reached her from an opposition leader, Jacek Kuron. She had good English, so would she accompany a Swedish television team to interview persecuted workers in the industrial town of Ursus, southwest of Warsaw? She agonized for three days. She did not want to be a political activist. She was afraid of another anti-Semitic campaign. And what about her daughter, who was then three?

Finally, Helena decided to go to Ursus. Why? She lights a cigarette, glances away for a second's thought, then says, in her quick way, "Oh, I don't know. Just a sense of decency." Decency, Orwell's cardinal virtue. She doesn't stop to reconstruct the way she was then. But the decision was everything, what in Poland is sometimes called "the Conradian moment"—that single choice which makes or mars a life. Conrad's Lord Jim jumped the wrong way when he abandoned what he thought was a sinking ship. Helena jumped the right way.

A year later, in 1977, she joined a group of friends—'68ers all—to start the samizdat magazine that I found her producing when I visited three years later. The first issue of *Robotnik*—the title was taken from a newspaper edited by the Polish independence hero Jozef Pilsudski before the First World War—appeared that September: four letter-size sheets, with smudged print on one side only. Helena was among those who insisted that its opening editorial should express a clear commitment to the ultimate goal of Polish independence. With Leonid Brezhnev in power in the Kremlin, that seemed like aiming your bicycle at Mars.

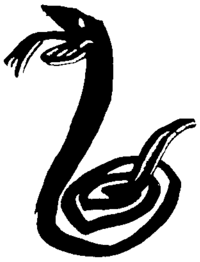
Helena quickly discovered the first requirement of being an editor: saying no. She remembers one article that her colleagues thought they should print because it was by a friend. She read it. It was no good. She told the author so, and spiked it. *Basta*—an editor is born. The style they developed, in this and other publications connected with KOR, the Workers' Defense Committee, was short, sharp, factual, colloquial. Friends jokingly referred to it as the "popgun" style. (In Polish, a popgun is a *korkowiec*, pronounced "corky"—a pun on KOR.) Partly the new style was a conscious reaction against the bloated Newspeak of the communist media. Partly it was because the magazine's staff had so little space. Partly, I think, it was because they wrote the way they spoke. Bang, bang, bang.

The "printing" of that first issue was done on an ancient duplicator, three hundred copies rolled from a revolving drum of blue ink. Later editions were made by a process involving a wooden frame, an inked silkscreen, and a squeegee roller. The paper's circulation grew, even as its editors were frequently harassed by the secret police, and by early 1980 its print run had reached twenty thousand copies. In August of that year, the Solidarity revolution began, and for sixteen months the paper, which was now appearing biweekly, was being produced without fear of immediate police intervention. Then, on December 13, 1981, everything changed: General Jaruzelski declared a "state of war." That night, as Army and police patrols arrested Solidarity members on Warsaw's snow-covered streets, Helena went into hiding. But within



"The yeas have it. Censure, and we'll give you a running start."

two months she and her colleagues had organized twenty hidden printing places—a small off-set press in a cellar, a duplicator in an attic, an old silkscreen machine pressed back into service—and were publishing a new underground paper for the Warsaw region of Solidarity: *Tygodnik Mazowsze* (*Mazovia Weekly*). A majority of the staff were women. They puttered around the city in their tiny Fiat 126s, with samizdat in the trunk, benefitting from the male chauvinism of the police. For how could a pale young woman, with a small child, in a little Fiat, be any threat to the police state? The publication, with the red Solidarity logo on its masthead (and a quote from the union's leader, Lech Walesa, "Solidarity will not allow itself to be divided or destroyed"), continued to appear regularly for seven years, until 1989, with print runs eventually as high as sixty thousand copies.



HELENA remembers this time as awful and exhausting. Although she no longer had to spend her whole life in hiding, everything to do with the paper had to be conspiratorial. The experience, she says, was "insufferable"—especially with a young daughter to look after. Her marriage disintegrated. Her energy was spent on dodging the police. And there was "no perspective": she did not know—none of us knew—that it would all end in 1989. As far as she could see, it would go on, and on, and on.

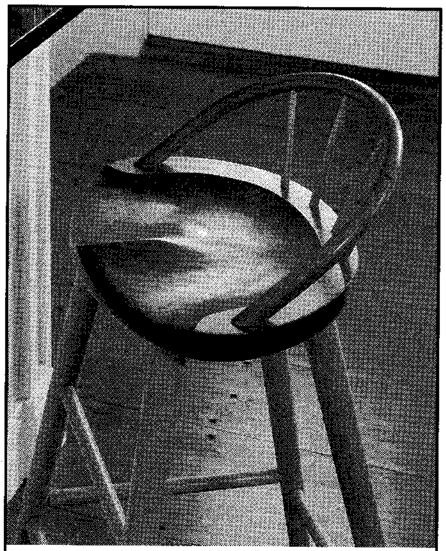
One day, she found herself walking past someone's vegetable patch and looking at it longingly. What the hell was she doing? Would she end up an isolated, fanatical political activist, as her father had been as a communist before the war? After five years, she needed a break, and in 1986 the communist authorities let her out to spend a year in the United States, as a "peace fellow" at Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute. It was an effort to return to Warsaw and to the endless grind of underground work. But she carried on producing *Tygodnik Mazowsze* out of cussed loyalty. Loyalty to the idea of Solidarity. Loyalty to the readers who went on buying the paper. Loyalty to her own underground team.

Then, in 1988, after a new wave of Solidarity strikes, the political ground began to move. The Jaruzelski regime, encouraged by Mikhail Gorbachev, sought dialogue with Solidarity, and, early the next year, all parties sat down to negotiate at a round table—a model that would later be imitated in Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. By April, 1989, they had agreed that elections should take place, that the opposition would participate, and that it should have a newspaper for the election campaign. Walesa asked Michnik to be its editor, and Michnik, in turn, asked Helena and her team from *Tygodnik Mazowsze* to run it. Michnik would be the public head of the paper; Helena would actually get the thing out.

There was very little time. The elections were set for June 4th. With scarcely eight weeks to go, a limited company, Agora, was formed to publish the new paper (its founding shareholders—there were twenty-four—included the film director Andrzej Wajda and the Solidarity leader Zbigniew Bujak). A month later, the first issue appeared, with an editorial declaring that its editors wanted to produce a "normal" newspaper. It seems such a modest ambition now, but the country had not known a normal newspaper for more than forty years. "Such a newspaper," its editors observed, would be "multifaced, quick, objective"—and, most important, it would clearly separate commentary from news.

Yet this first issue was openly partisan. Its tabloid front page was an appeal to vote for Lech Walesa, beneath a large photograph of him. Above the masthead was the slogan that I had so often heard protesters chant in the streets: "*Nie ma wolnosci bez Solidarnosci.*" ("There's no liberty without Solidarity.") And six of the paper's eight pages were filled with potted biographies of what it called "our candidates" for parliament.

In these early days, the paper's poor print quality made it look very much like that of the communist newspapers—not surprising, since the paper was printed on the same press that produced *Trybuna Ludu*, the communist-party daily. Michnik had to wrangle with communist leaders to get the paper he needed. The type was hand set, in



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lead (the typesetters drinking vodka by the litre and suffering from lead poisoning). The censor sat upstairs, above the printers. Once, during the election campaign, I asked Helena if I could take a cartoon up for approval. I found a frumpy woman in a cheap floral dress, with a glass of tea and a cigarette hanging from her lip, who examined the cartoon carefully and then signed it on the back. For the first couple of years, *Gazeta Wyborcza* was a long way from its proclaimed ideal of a "normal" newspaper: fact sacred, opinion free. Its news stories were often selective and sarcastically partisan. Critics punned that the paper was not the *Electoral* but the *Selectoral* (*wybiorcza* rather than *wyborcza*).

Its first editorial office, at No. 19 Iwicka Street, was in a former nursery school. It still had low tables and child-size chairs. On warm days, editorial meetings were held round a sandpit in the garden. When I visited for the first time, I found an atmosphere of creative chaos, with people dashing about in plumes of cigarette smoke, amid shouts, laughter, and crying, and telephones that never stopped ringing: Helena's apartment writ large.

THE *Electoral Paper* was the organ of the Solidarity opposition in the first free election in Poland for more than fifty years. How much did it contribute to Solidarity's victory? It's an open question. Poles had more than enough reasons to vote out the communists after so many years of nonelected communist misrule. But the paper decisively contributed to the next step: the appointment of a non-communist Prime Minister—the first in Eastern Europe since 1948—and the installation of General Jaruzelski, the architect of martial law, as President, to reassure Moscow. It was the paper that first suggested this. In a characteristic division of labor, Michnik wrote the editorial advancing the radical proposal, while Helena thought up the historic banner headline: "YOUR PRESIDENT, OUR PREMIER." His article, her headline. With interventions like this, *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote itself into the history of Poland's negotiated revolution, rather as the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* had done in the nineteen-seventies, during Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy.

Like so many revolutionaries before them, Solidarity's leaders began fighting among themselves soon after their triumph. In the aftermath of this "war at the top"—as Walesa described it—the official Solidarity leadership told the paper to remove the union's slogan from the masthead. There was not that much solidarity left now that liberty had arrived. In an election in late 1990, Lech Walesa stood for President against Tadeusz Mazowiecki, his former Solidarity adviser. The paper backed Mazowiecki, but Walesa won.

IT was time to become a "normal" newspaper. The editors moved out of the nursery school and took over two floors of a nearby office building. Today, those offices look, at first glance, much like those of a normal Western paper: open-plan, computerized, with a cool aesthetic of pale blues and grays, so unlike the strident red, white, and black of the years of struggle. And yet they aren't. Helena shares a cramped office at the back of the newsroom with a senior editor. Both have small modern desks, rather like something you might buy for a teen-age daughter. Casually dressed journalists crowd into Helena's office for the afternoon conference, standing in the doorway or sitting on the floor. No instructions are barked from the head of a long editorial conference table. Instead, people argue amid the cigarette smoke, with Helena joining in from her little desk. If I half-close my eyes, I can almost imagine myself back in Helena's old kitchen.

But insiders warn me that appearances can deceive. When I used the word "egalitarian" to describe the ethos of the paper, one of them exclaimed, "Egalitarian shmegalitarian! You should see the way Helena talks to an intern." And she can lose her cool and bawl out older colleagues. I ask Helena if she feels that her new power has changed the way people relate to her. She reflects for a moment and says, "Well, perhaps a little, yes." I'm afraid it may be more than she thinks. It is said that younger members of the editorial staff go in fear of her. Several talented journalists have left after arguments. Most painfully, she has ceased to be friends with two of her closest associates from the underground. It's an old story: together under oppression, divided in freedom.

Everyone, but everyone, says that the paper revolves around Helena. She is there from morning to night, and is renowned for going over pieces line by line. Even some close friends don't have her private number, because they can always reach her at the office. And she likes her staff to be there, too. I was told that one afternoon word got about that Helena had gone out for a few hours to a beautician. Within twenty minutes, the office had emptied.

WHAT is the paper like now? The offhand, mildly sarcastic tone persists. It's a tone that is impatient, even contemptuous, of an older, stuffier, conservative, Catholic, nationalist Poland, for which Warsaw slang has coined the delightful term *bogojczyzniony*—roughly, "god-and-fatherlandized." ("Mrs. Z is very nice, but a little god-and-fatherlandized.") The tabloid-format paper's front page still carries its short, lively "popgun style" stories: "FED TNIE STOPY" ("FED CUTS RATES") is the headline of a copy I pick up at random. (Ten years ago, most Poles would not have known what the Fed was, let alone have cared about its interest rates.) When I've been interviewed by journalists from the paper, I have found that my sentences get chopped up into short, snappy ones, so I start sounding like one of them: bang, bang, bang. There is strong foreign coverage and—reflecting the country's rapid advance to capitalism—a growing amount of business news.

In the weekend edition, there are long essays—about history, the Polish Catholic church, Polish-Jewish relations, developments in other post-Communist countries—of the kind more usually found in intellectual monthlies and quarterlies. It's like having the *New York Review of Books* in the center pages of a tabloid. Finally, there is the contribution of the editor-in-chief, Adam Michnik. His sharply written, signed commentaries have provoked fierce protest even from his own staff—as when, in the middle of the 1995 Presidential campaign, he seemed implicitly to give his support to the post-communist (and ultimately successful) candidate Aleksander Kwasniewski, against none other than the incumbent, Lech Walesa. Michnik was also one of the few people in Poland to criticize some of the statements made by the Pope on his most recent visit to his native land.

WANDA RAPACZYNSKI explained to me the commercial strategy of what the rest of the Polish press enviously calls "Agoraland." Wanda is the paper's business supremo. She and Helena were childhood friends and attended the same secondary school. Wanda left Poland after the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968 and, at the age of twenty-one, moved to the United States, where she studied to be an academic psychologist, married, had a daughter, then went to the Yale School of Management, and worked for Citibank in New York, before Helena persuaded her to return.

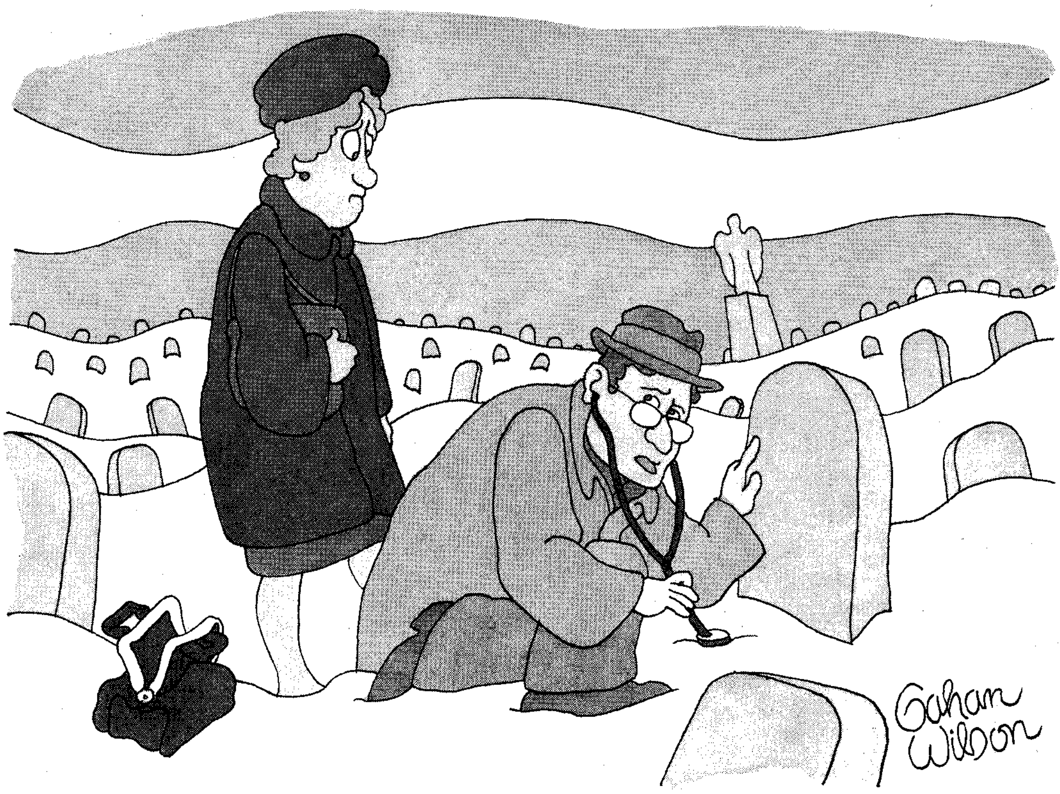
The company had to grow and diversify, Wanda explained to me, accounting for its expansion into radio and television. It needed to protect itself, she said, against a possible future recession, in which advertising revenues might slump. Advertising—which until 1989 rarely featured in any Polish periodical—now accounts for more than seventy per cent of the paper's revenue: the kind of healthy ratio that you'd expect to find in any Madison Avenue publication. Anyway, to diversify was simply "the law of the market." But where to find the capital? "My borrowing capacity far exceeds the lending capacity of any Polish bank," Wanda said. Hence the decision to go public. But before doing so the editors had to restructure the company.

The paper is no stranger to foreign investors. In the heroic early days, it had help from Western friends. The French newspaper *Libération* sold a special issue on the paper's behalf. *Le Monde* donated an old printing press, and a group of American supporters, including Robert Silvers and Rea Hederman, of the *New York Review of Books*, lent money to transport the press from France. Although that press was never actually used, it served as collateral for loans from Polish banks. (So much have things changed that a couple of years ago the paper got a letter from *Le Monde* asking if *Gazeta* would now like to invest in it.) The editors found a substantial American private investor, Cox Enterprises, an Atlanta-based media company and the owner of the Atlanta *Journal-Constitution*, and they obtained an eight-million-dollar loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

But until recently the company was a business anachronism, a financial world's wonder: worth hundreds of millions of dollars but without a clear owner. It had twenty-four founding shareholders but, true to the idealistic collective spirit in which it had begun, these shares had no financial value. What was to be done? Finally, they came up with a solution that creates two kinds of stock: A shares, which have special voting rights to protect the company from hostile takeovers; and ordinary shares, which will be the ones made available when the company goes public and will have considerable financial value. Helena, Wanda, and the thirty-nine-year-old publisher, Piotr Niemczycki—the three constitute the executive board—together with one other editor and a senior manager, control the A shares. The five of them also own ordinary shares, along with ninety-five others. There is a stock-purchase scheme for about seventeen hundred other employees, and an annual incentive plan to reward managers and journalists with more stock. "Hardly a case of heartless, cold capitalism," Wanda said.

Yet however liberal, meritocratic, and broad-based they have tried to make the division of the cake, the fact is that in a few years some of those involved in the paper will be very much richer than others. Seriously rich, by Polish standards. "I worry about the day when department heads start arriving in their new BMWs," one young journalist said. What will happen then to the casual, informal, still outwardly egalitarian atmosphere of the paper? And, in this capitalist multimedia giant, what place is there for the trades-union movement whose organ the *Electoral Paper* originally was? None, it would appear.

I ask Helena if there is a Solidarity



"I'm afraid there's really very little I can do."

branch in the paper. No, there isn't. And she is unapologetic: "I'm not going to pretend to you that it's in my interest, as an employer, to have a Solidarity branch here." But she says the paper is an exemplary employer, offering generous work conditions and benefits. The story is complicated by the fact that Solidarity has now become a movement of the right. As the Solidarity Electoral Action, a coalition of right-wing parties, it won last year's election promising, among other things, more state help for workers. Helena, by contrast, is a vehement supporter of the free-market liberal Freedom Union party. When I first sent her a note about this article, I recalled how I had once described her as "the Rosa Luxemburg of Solidarity." She wrote back, "I am Thatcher now." Later, as we talked in her apartment, Michnik teasingly remarked that what she likes about Margaret Thatcher is the "strong woman." She retorted that what she really admires is the way "the Iron Lady" revived Britain's moribund economy by tough, neo-liberal economic policies.

Michnik, as it happens, won't have the problem of deciding what to do with all the money. He has flatly declined to take any shares. In effect, he has turned down a million dollars. He told me that his intellectual independence and editorial judgment might be jeopardized if he was always thinking, What might this do to the value of my shares? While no one can credibly accuse Michnik of heading the paper for the money, it doesn't mean that someone won't try. As people realize just how rich and powerful Agora has become, and because Adam Michnik, Helena, and Wanda are Jewish, the Jewish theme may reëmerge in the right-wing press. Helena thinks the subject of Polish-Jewish tensions is often greatly overplayed in the West. But she is the first to accept that the Polish-Jewish relationship is far from normal.

The continuing tensions are illustrated by a regular feature in the paper. In a supplement called Supermarket, there is a long list of help lines: for AIDS, drug abuse, suicide, and so on. At the end of the alphabetical list appears *Zydowski*—Jewish—"telephone of the Jewish Forum for people who have problems with Jewish origins." Ring 652 2144 on a Thursday evening.

Normal this isn't. But the new Poland for which the paper stands is precisely one in which people can be Jewish Poles, or Catholic Poles, or agnostic Poles, or Protestant Poles, or Ukrainian Poles; white, black, or brown Poles. Here is the great battle that runs through the Polish—and the European—twentieth century, the battle between a narrow ethnic nationalism and a broader civic nationalism. Even if *Gazeta Wyborcza* has not always managed to practice the tolerance that it preaches, it has, at least, always preached it.

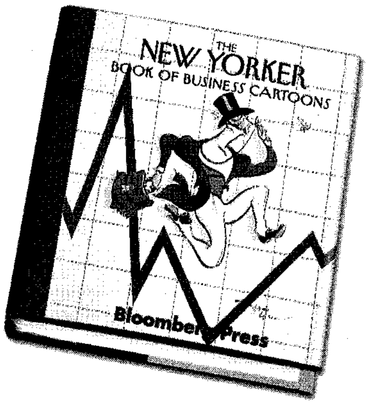
I FIND myself wondering where the paper and Poland will be in ten years. Over the last decade, both have travelled such a vast distance toward a Western-style "normality," and travelled it so exuberantly and so well. Yet still, at every turn, you find some Polish peculiarity. Will the peculiarities gradually disappear? Will the editorial mix become more like that of any other Western paper, with more entertainment and fewer ideas? Perhaps in the new editorial building that is being planned, at an estimated cost of twenty-five million dollars, there will be large offices and desks and men in suits and ties barking orders from the end of long conference tables. Must the gains and losses always balance out, like entries in an accountant's ledger? More prosperity, less equality. More freedom, less intensity. More tolerance, less solidarity.

I would like to think that some positive singularities will remain. But if I had to lay a wager I would bet that they will go. The pressures of a Western consumerist, entertainment model of "normality" may prove more difficult to resist than those of the Soviet-type communist "normalization" that Solidarity so roundly and unexpectedly defeated. Perhaps this is the last irony of freedom's battle: the compulsory could be defied, but the voluntary may be irresistible. ♦

In about 1,500 automated job interviews reviewed by screening firm HReasy Inc., Charlotte, N.C., 22% of prospects said an employee who steals less than $5 from a company should get another chance.
—*Wall Street Journal.*

To steal more?

Very funny business, indeed!



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THE WHITE PROBLEM

Some buildings just aren't right for Manhattan.

BY JAMES COLLINS

David Zale, a securities analyst, has a very prestigious address. He owns an apartment at 910 Fifth Avenue, which is on the northeast corner of Seventy-second Street. Those coördinates must look great on a piece of stationery, but Zale is not happy with the place where he lives. In fact, he seems a bit embarrassed by it, though it is difficult to imagine how anyone could be embarrassed by a building on Fifth in the Seventies, the front façade of the city's best Zip Code.

If you walk by 910 Fifth, however, you will see the problem: the building is clad in white brick. "It's an ugly building," Zale says. "I feel sorry for the people who have to look at us." This sentiment is shared by other residents, and some members of the co-op board have raised the possibility of replacing the exterior. "We know that altering the brick would increase the value of the building," Zale explains. And, in any case, the shareholders would no longer feel as if they had shown up at a Fifth Avenue dinner party wearing white polyester. "What can I tell you?" Zale says. "We all live in New York, and we hate white brick."

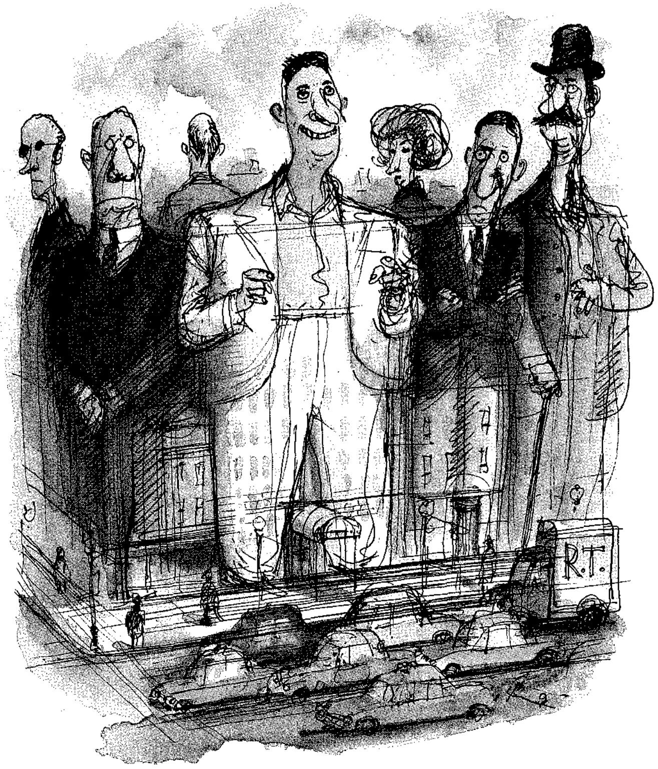
Edith Wharton once wrote that brownstone (which is a type of sandstone) was "the most hideous stone ever quarried." These days, New Yorkers seem to have a similar attitude toward white brick. At least one building in Manhattan has replaced its white brick with red; a few others are in the process of doing so. Usually this is because structural problems required some action, but it wasn't necessary to change the color of the façade. The president of a local real-estate company says, "I think the most eloquent statement about the status of white brick right now is what's going on at 35 East Eighty-fifth Street," one of the buildings where new red brick is climbing the walls like a rash.

Charmless, stripped down, and marketed to the aspiring middle classes, the white-brick apartment buildings that appeared in New York in the two decades after the war were the urban equivalent of ranch houses. Writing about them in "New York 1960," Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman use words like "aggressive banality." But this phrase does not go far enough. Their whiteness isn't merely sterile; it is in bad taste. It is the whiteness of a white Pontiac Catalina or a white baby grand.

Where did these buildings come from? A seventies-era opaque-glass tower set in a plaza may not be attractive, but it is at least understandable. The appeal of white brick is harder to fathom. Yet it became so ubiquitous after the war that a white-brick building on Second Avenue, with a Food Emporium on the ground floor and battered delivery bikes outside, is as emblematic of New York as pushcarts on Orchard Street.

The simplest explanation would seem to be that brick manufacturers had developed a new product and begun pushing it during the postwar building boom. To investigate this hypothesis, I paid a visit to Belden Brick Sales & Service, on Park Avenue South, which is one of the oldest and largest suppliers of brick to the New York market. Joe Rice, Belden's president, explained what the material in question actually is: brick with a ceramic glaze applied to it. Then he told me that it has a long history. "Glazed brick was used on the walls of Jericho," said Rice, who also showed me a picture of himself at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London, standing next to some glazed brick dating from 3400 B.C. ("I'm one of the real geeks of this industry," he confessed.) Although advances have been made over the millennia, the process of making glazed brick remains straightforward. "The natural color of the brick is creamy beige," Rice said. After the brick is dried—but before it is fired—one side is coated with glaze, which can be of any color. "It's basically the same material as porcelain," he explained. So when people say that white-brick buildings look like bathrooms, they are more right than they know.

According to Christopher Gray, the director of the Office for Metropolitan History, the earliest white-brick building in New York City may be 780 West End Avenue, which was built in 1914. There are several other white-brick façades of the same vintage nearby, and if you look around town you will see a number of prewar office buildings and apartment houses clad in the material. The Daily News Building is one example. White brick was a familiar, if not common, building material before the war. Moreover, Rice told me that the brick industry is not much good at marketing or creating de-



"I think Florida was an influence," one architect says. "A lot of developers spent time there."

RICHARD THOMPSON

mand. "It's all driven by the architects," he said.

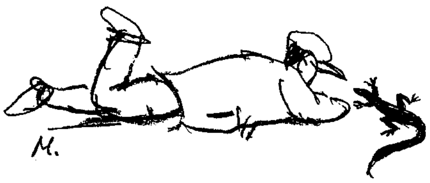
So which architect was guilty of introducing white brick to the postwar vocabulary as recklessly as someone introduced the gypsy moth to the Northeast? Blame is most often assigned to Gordon Bunshaft, the prolific and eminent modernist who, as part of the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was one of the dominant figures in postwar American architecture. Bunshaft was the principal designer of Manhattan House, the giant apartment complex, built in 1950, that fills the entire block between Sixty-fifth and Sixty-sixth Streets and Second and Third Avenues. Lewis Mumford, in these pages, called it "this White Whale of an apartment house" and referred to its "high palisade of beaming white walls." (The brick is actually a very pale gray.)

If Bunshaft's crime was to usher in the white-brick fad, however, he had his accomplices. An architectural historian named Matt Postal pointed out to me that before white brick appeared on Manhattan House it was used at 40 Central Park South, an apartment building designed by the firm of Mayer & Whittlesey, which was completed in 1941. Here the white bricks are interspersed with gray ones, but the theme is clear. As it happens, Mayer & Whittlesey worked with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill on the design of Manhattan House. The former firm was known more for elegant floor plans than for grand conceptions, but Manhattan House was a full collaboration, so Mayer & Whittlesey must also bear some responsibility for the way Second Avenue looks today, with white-brick buildings ranked together like washing machines at a laundromat.

Manhattan House was a great commercial success, and one theory for the spread of white brick is that other architects and developers simply imitated it—pursuing modernism, albeit in degraded form. Bunshaft appears to have left no record of why he and his associates chose that particular brick for Manhattan House, but as a disciple of Le Corbusier he would naturally have inclined toward white. For decades, modernists had used white to convey utopian purity, and no one did more to promote white exteriors than Le Corbusier. Transmitted by Bunshaft, Corbu's ideas—noble, abstruse, French—are thus reflected in Townsend House (Seventy-first and Third) and Eastwood Towers (Seventy-second and First), which were both built in the early sixties. However, since the architects who imitated Bunshaft were often far inferior to him and worked under more severe financial constraints, their application of the modernist idiom was usually botched. "These buildings correspond to ideas of modern architecture—optimistic and clean," Stern told me. "But they were thrown up."

This is the classic story of the Fall—great modernist building gets bastardized by third-raters—and the account that appeals to highbrows. In their view, there's little else to talk about in postwar architecture except modernism and deviations from it. But the relationship between modernism and postwar apartment houses in New York is tangled. Even the bare look of these buildings, usually attributed to the modernist influence, had a lot to do with economics and the habits established during the nineteen-thirties and forties, when most of the apartments being built were public housing. If you talk to the builders and developers who actually put up the white-brick structures, you get a version of events that is not irreconcilable with the intellectuals' theory but has a very different emphasis.

THE person largely responsible for David Zale's misery at 910 Fifth Avenue is Robert Bien. When Bien retired, in 1996, he had been designing buildings in New York for forty years. His father, Sylvan, was also an architect—he was responsible for the Carlyle Hotel, among many other buildings—and the two worked together from the early nineteen-fifties until Sylvan's death, in 1959. One of their projects that year was a complete overhaul of 910 Fifth, a stately prewar edifice built in 1919. When I told Bien about the possible plans for the building, he said, "Go back to the original limestone." Bien is tall and soft-spoken and has a slightly lopsided mouth. On the day we met at the real-estate office where he works part time, he was wearing a gray suit and a blue button-down shirt. Frederick P. Rose, one of the city's most prominent builders, calls certain very famous architects "amateurs" when it comes to designing apartment buildings. Bien was a pro, someone in tune with the developers' needs who also took a modest pride in his work. "I got a spread in Stern's book," he told me. Later, though, he acknowledged that "New York 1960" is quite harsh about the Biens. "Stern kept using a word—what was it? It means uninteresting or mediocre. . . . Oh, yes—banal."

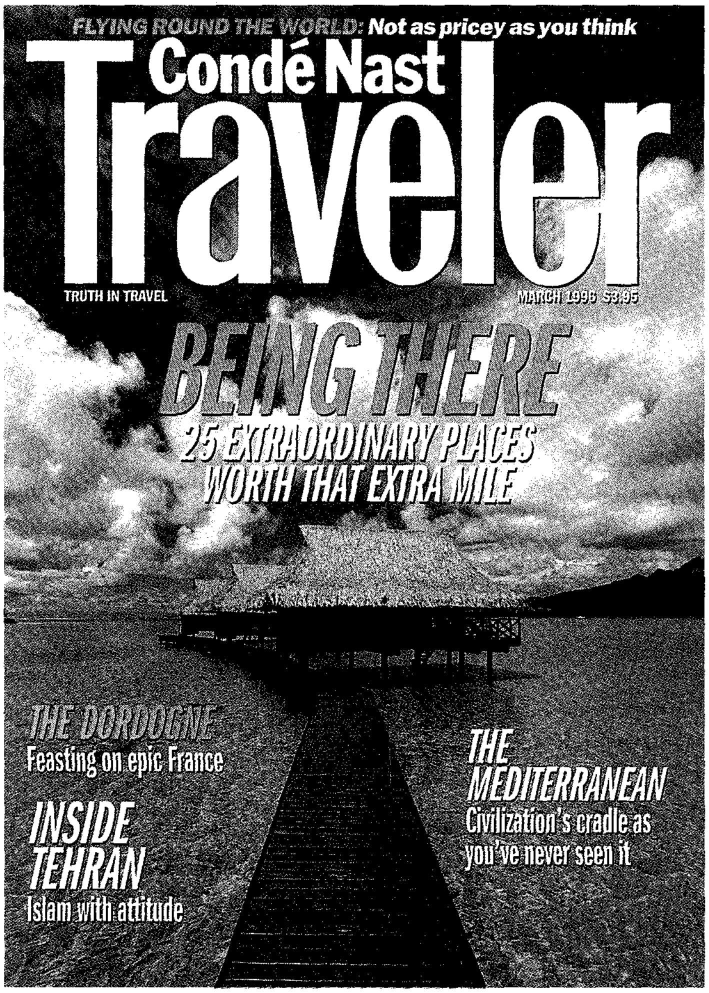


Together and separately, Bien and his father used white brick several times, and I asked him why. "It was a very classy material," he said. "What people don't realize is that the white-glazed brick started on Fifth Avenue and spread east." Two buildings clad in near-white brick appeared on Madison Avenue between 1947 and 1948. In 1951, Sylvan Bien used white-glazed brick when he built 923 Fifth Avenue, and he designed the first white-brick apartment building on Park, No. 605, which dates from 1954. Then the demolition of the El, in 1956, set off a burst of new construction east of Lexington, prompting one developer to predict that Second Avenue would soon "vie with Park Avenue as a fashionable address."

"The whole idea" of white brick, Bien told me, "was for it to look like limestone or marble from a distance. Everybody thought it was pretty hot stuff—'This is class.'" Bien dismissed the idea that Manhattan House had been an inspiration, saying that his father "was a pretty good architect without having to imitate anybody." He looked blank when I mentioned Le Corbusier, and said that he was not someone they had consciously thought about. Richard Roth, of Emery Roth & Sons, which was a major New York architectural firm for several decades, agreed with Bien on these points. "White brick was always there," he said, "and then, after the war, it was first used on Park and Fifth. It was considered de-luxe. I don't think Manhattan House was a great influence. Modernism and Le Corbusier had nothing to do with it. It had to do with what was being sold as luxury." The fact that white-glazed brick costs about twice as much as regular brick contributed to this reputation.

One architect who designed many white-brick buildings was Philip Birn-

PURE PLEASURE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baum, who died in 1996. Costas Kondylis, who worked with Birnbaum in the nineteen-eighties, offered another theory about the appeal of white brick. "I think Florida was an influence," he said. "A lot of developers spent time there. And they looked to Florida for ideas in marketing."

Dara Birnbaum, Philip Birnbaum's daughter, also favors this theory. "When I was a very small child," she told me, "I remember the start of the use of white brick for the façades of many of the high-rises that my father was designing in the five boroughs. My memory was that my father also, at this precise time, started to design buildings for Kaskel"—the late Alfred Kaskel—"and others in Florida. He was impressed by the 'lightness' of, for example, the buildings in Miami Beach."

There are still other explanations: Red brick had become associated with public housing, and so was out of fashion. "It was considered cheesy," Bien told me. Lacking all ornamentation, the new "luxury" apartment buildings often didn't look very different from housing projects, so white and other light-colored bricks were used to set them apart. Then, too, developers wanted their buildings to look different from the dark, shabby tenements that surrounded them. Finally, manufacturers claimed that glazed brick was self-cleaning. (The brick used for Manhattan House, for example, supposedly needed "only the wind and rain to keep its kiln-fresh complexion.") But this wasn't exactly true: today most white-brick buildings look like four-day-old New York snow.

No doubt all these factors contributed to the popularity of white brick. For the developers, however, it probably mattered most that white brick conveyed luxury and that it brought the look of Miami Beach to Third Avenue. Obviously, modernism influenced tastes, and itself became associated with luxury and sophistication. But which is more likely: that white brick appealed to developers because it was optimistic or because it was classy? Unfortunately, white brick just doesn't work very well as a substitute for marble or limestone. Stern remarked, "It reflects light, but when it's not in the light it looks absolutely dead." Likewise, Manhattan is not Miami Beach, and a style that might have suited Jackie Gleason in his variety-show years is not one that belongs here.

In truth, the outside appearance of a building doesn't matter that much to developers. As Fred Rose said, "A building is designed from inside out. The floor plans are the important thing, not the elevation." The whole idea is to get as much rentable space out of the zoning envelope as you can; the exterior is just a nice extra that helps with marketing. Real-estate agents say that the floor plans of many buildings from the fifties and sixties are very good. They are more efficient than prewar apartments, with more windows, and the rooms are more spacious than those of apartments constructed in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Some of the earliest white-brick buildings even have plaster walls and parquet floors. None of them ever achieved the glamour of Manhattan House, though. In part because of the neighborhoods they were built in, white-brick buildings became associated with the lumpen bourgeoisie, so that today anyone with a pretense to style would rather live in a higgledy-piggledy Chelsea rehab.

THE white-brick fad came to an end when tastes changed in the late sixties, around the same time that the bricks on some white buildings began to crack and spald (pop out). As Joe Rice, the brick geek, is eager to tell you, brick walls are quite porous, and moisture that builds up behind them can usually escape through the front. Glazing, however, keeps that moisture in, so a white-brick building must be constructed with special care. In the fifties and sixties, many of the people who used white brick didn't really know what they were doing, and that's why scaffolding surrounds so many of the buildings today.

That is also why the white-brick building faces some danger in the future. There is little chance that all of these buildings will disappear, but, as bricks in more façades crack or spald, more owners may choose to replace the brick entirely. Some of these buildings are in landmark districts, so the city one day may have to rule on the historical importance of white brick. I could find no nouveau-sixties faddist or young modernist who wanted to take up the white-brick cause. However, Peg Breen, the president of the Landmarks Conservancy, expressed dismay at the replacement trend. "We'd rather see even the classic Second Avenue white-brick buildings left alone," she said. "They are what they are—let's be honest about that."

Breen may have summed up my own new attitude toward white-brick buildings: they are what they are. Looking at a typical East Side block, you tend to despise the white brick and swoon over the tenements, with their disproportionate cornices and rhythmic fire escapes. That is the postmodernist reflex. Since these tenements are no longer tenements, they readily yield to sentimentality, calling to mind the earthier civilization of taverns and pawnshops which once flourished in the El's shadow. It's hard to forgive the postwar buildings, and the plasticky white ones in particular, for displacing all that. Yet you can also see how someone might have believed that a shiny white façade was an improvement over the tenements' grunge.

Both types of building are organic outgrowths of New York, created by the same greed and expediency, with a dash of design, that has produced everything else in the city. The white-brick buildings are a form of vernacular architecture, and although they may never be as charming as a Greek Revival house, they are an authentic expression of one era's economic and aesthetic conditions. Robert Bien showed me many pictures of his projects, which include churches and offices as well as apartment houses. He wanted to make me understand that, despite the limitations imposed on him, he had tried to vary the look of his white-brick buildings with the treatment of balconies, water-tank enclosures, and so on, and in some cases he had succeeded. But one of them, 301 East Seventy-fifth, the Wilshire, looks exactly like dozens of others built in the sixties. I asked Bien whether he considered this building beautiful. "I thought all my buildings were beautiful," he said cheerfully. It is a difficult exercise of the imagination to see what he means in this case, but compared with some of the new condominium towers, all tarted up with "prewar" devices and water-tower enclosures resembling Grant's Tomb, maybe the Wilshire doesn't look so bad. ♦

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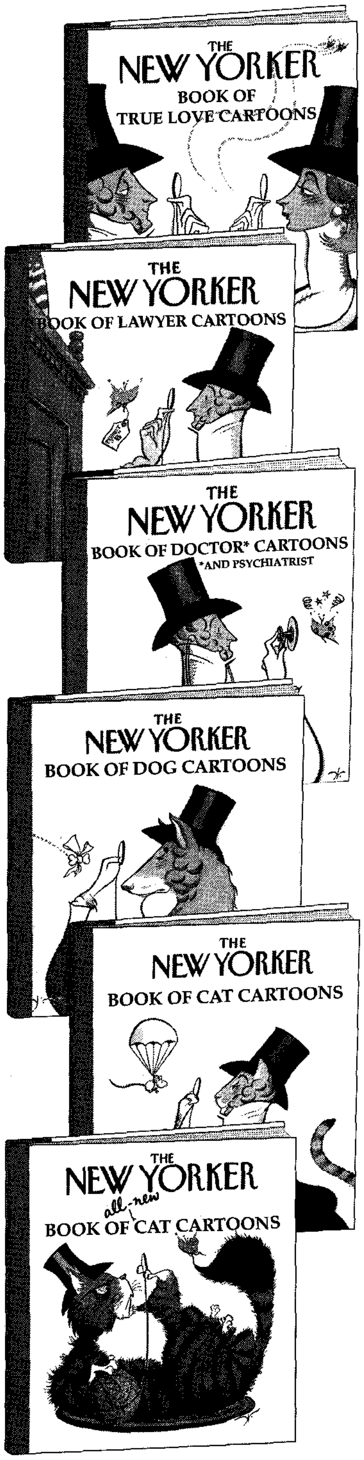
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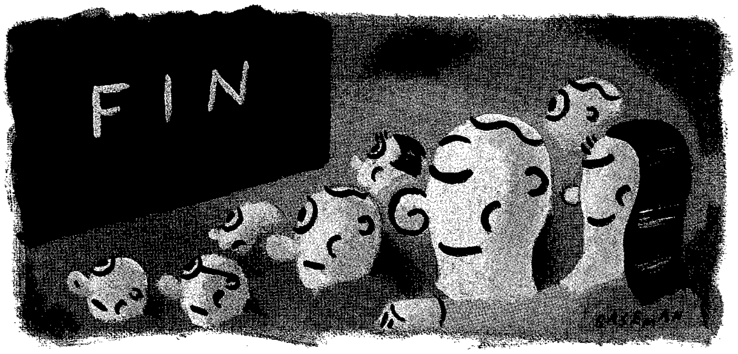
CLOSURE

BY STEVE MARTIN



CLOSURE. I wanted it. Or I wasn't going to be able to move on. The taxi had dropped me off fully ten blocks earlier than I had requested. Sixty-first instead of Seventy-first. Luckily, I had copied down the cab number in case for some reason I needed closure. This time I did. I called the taxi company from my cell phone. I told them what I wanted. "Some kind of closure," I said. They understood. But my troubles had just begun.

It was a little matter of being short-changed at the supermarket. One dollar and fifty cents. Not much, but as I stood there counting the change, realizing the mistake, I couldn't move on. I confronted the checkout girl. "Oops," she said. Oops? Oops? This was not closure. How was I to move on? The manager came over. He understood closure. He apologized and took responsibility. I was lucky. I could move on.

My girlfriend, Josie, was already at the apartment. I had given her a key just two weeks earlier. I came in with the groceries. We put them away and ordered in. We watched the news. Murder, larceny, confidence games: so many people who couldn't move on. I kissed her and held her hand. I took her to the bedroom. I tried to make love to her, but couldn't. Too many loose ends. But she wanted closure. I explained that because so many people in my life weren't taking responsibility, it became impossible for me to accept my own responsibility. She understood. But she still wanted closure.

Two days go by. My movie-theatre free-admission coupon is not being honored. A line forms behind me as I explain my situation to the ticket-seller. I had called ahead to make sure it would be honored. They said it would be. Yet here I am, being embarrassed in front of strangers. Josie says, "Let's pay," and suggests that we move on. I cannot. I tell them I will need closure. The man selling tickets says the coupon people made a mistake, and they are the ones who will need to take responsibility. "So you need closure," I say. "Yes," he replies, "before we can move on." "So my closure is dependent on your closure," I say. "Yes." Just then Josie says, "I need closure too, tonight." She pays. I move on, even though I am unable to move on.

We watch the movie. It is about Mary, Queen of Scots. She was beheaded. At least she got closure. When the movie is over, it says, "The end." We can go home.

Pop goes the champagne cork. Josie starts drinking. I start to worry. She starts kissing me. I am helpless. I can't move on. The phone rings and the machine picks up. It's the manager of the movie theatre. "I talked with the coupon people," he says. "They will issue a new coupon. I'm hoping now we can move on." I smile at Josie. But something's still not right. I notice the answering machine blinking. I irritate Josie when I play back the message. It is the taxi company with a full apology. I can move on.

I give Josie closure. She snuggles next to me. A candle burns to the end and snuffs itself out. The moonlight trickles into the bedroom. I look at the bedroom door. It's ajar. I know what I need. ♦

GARY BASEMAN

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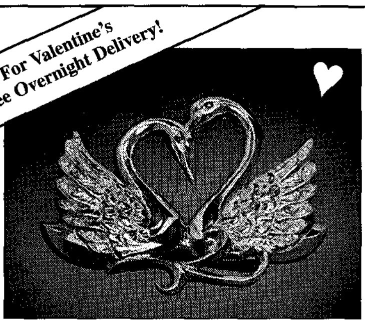

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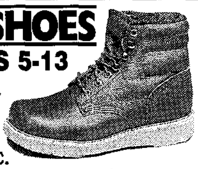

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REFLECTIONS

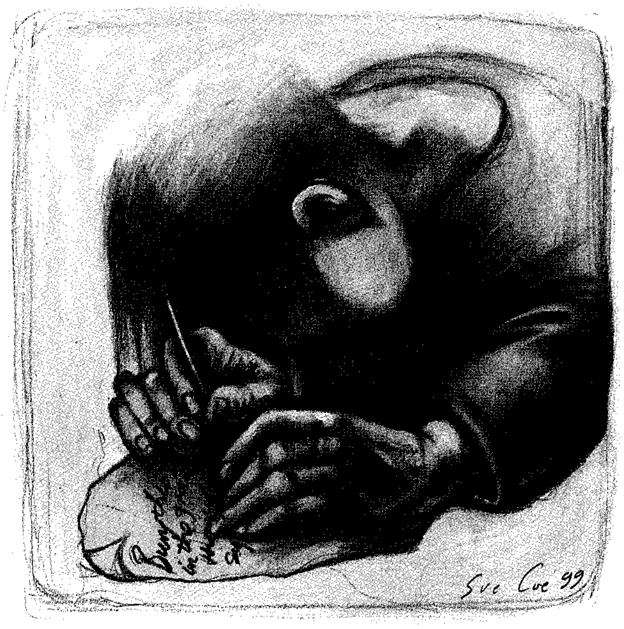
NOTES LEFT BEHIND

The language of suicide.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

ONE winter morning about twenty years ago, shortly before daybreak, I sat on my bed looking into a mirror I had leaned against the back of a chair, and held a gun to my right temple. The gun was loaded, and I had my finger on the trigger. I was a policeman in a small town. I had worked until two and had come home and played some records and drunk two beers. The gun was my work gun, and I used to unload it each night and put the bullets in a desk drawer and the gun under a blanket at the top of a closet. Feeling its weight against my temple, I thought, I wonder what makes people pull the trigger. I had not been despondent. I was just interested to know what the components of such a moment were, the way a friend of mine who wanted to be a poet had walked across the campus of his college in Iowa one night in the snow, in bare feet, so he would know how to describe being cold.

I was a policeman in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. I was twenty-three. Most of the things I was seeing as a policeman I had never seen before. The husbands and wives who fought so bitterly that their children called the station for help. The women who met their lovers while their husbands or boyfriends dragged fishing nets on boats whose lights you could sometimes find at night on the horizon. The solitary, intoxicated figures walking home in the cold after the bars had closed. The woman who had to be removed from the house she had occupied all her life because she had become susceptible to hearing voices and seeing figures that weren't there, and the imploring way she looked at me—that is, into the eyes of another human being—for an explanation.



I could say goodbye and do whatever else I cared to and feel sure that everyone would remember me.

SUE COE

One evening, the dispatcher sent me to a house by the bay where an old man was lying on a couch with a blanket drawn up to his chest. His wife stood beside him, wringing her hands. "We were watching television," she said, "same as every night, and he made a sound in his throat, like he was choking, and he wouldn't wake up. I tried to wake him, but I couldn't." Sherman Merrill, my partner, gave him oxygen from a tank that was kept in the trunk of the police car. The man's mouth had gaped open, and his cheeks had turned blue. Out of consideration for the woman's feelings, Sherman held the mask in such a way that she couldn't see them. It was the business of the medical examiner, who had been called, to say that he was dead. Having heard that a doctor was coming, the woman assumed that her husband would be revived. "No point giving this man oxygen," the doctor said as he walked through the door. "He's dead—can't anybody see that?" The woman brought her hands to her face and began sobbing. I went outside and walked a circle on the lawn to compose myself, and when I came back through the door she was on the phone and I heard her say, "Your father died tonight."

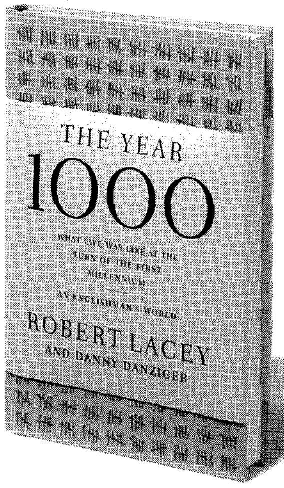
A woman from a town at the other end of the Cape called the police station one afternoon and asked if we would deliver a message to her husband, who was visiting the house they were building for their retirement; the house had no phone. I was in the station when Charles Berrio, another patrolman, who was known as Chickie, found him. The man had attached a length of yellow nylon cord to a water pipe in the ceiling of the basement and tied the other end around his neck. Since Chickie had one of the town's two police cars and the Chief had the other, I asked Lori Kmiec, a dispatcher, who was leaving for the day, if she would take me there, but she said she wouldn't go near a house with a dead body in it. Someone else took me, I forget who. I walked through the front door. In a chair by a picture window looking over the marsh was an old man sitting with his hands folded in his lap. He paid no attention to me. The man hanging from the rope in the basement had his back to a sliding glass door that framed an inlet of the marsh. His knees were bent, and his feet were touching the cement floor. He had taken his shoes off. The ceiling was so low that there had been no tension to the rope; he had brought about his end simply by letting his body go slack. He could have stood up anytime he lost his nerve. In the shadowy basement, Chickie, his eyes not yet adjusted from the daylight, had walked into him. Months later, when the subject of the man's suicide came up, Chickie said that the figure of a hanging man still appeared in his dreams.

The county man arrived and took photographs, and then Chickie applied the blade of a pocketknife to the yellow cord. None of us looked into one another's eyes as we lowered him. It felt as if we were performing an ancient gesture. The man from the funeral home showed up and poked at the dead man's swollen neck and said, "I don't know how I'm going to get that down for an open casket."

I asked Chickie about the man upstairs. "Guy's brother," he said. "Deaf. Never heard a thing."

I stood for a while looking at the piece of rope and the water pipe and the view out the window. I felt the way I remembered feeling as a child when, rising early, I could hear the voices of my parents through the walls of their bedroom—my father's low and rumbling and my mother's high, the combination like a piece of music—but I couldn't make out what they were actually saying, and I had the feeling that the substance of their conversation was important and that if I could understand it I would be in possession of something profound.

BECAUSE the eight other officers, including the Chief and the Sergeant, had been on the police force much longer than I had, I worked from midnight to eight more than anyone else. In the winter, after two, I was the only policeman on duty. Approximately two thousand people lived in Wellfleet, and there wasn't often much to engage me. Arrest drunk drivers on the state road. Travel the sand roads through the woods. Visit the ocean. I was supposed to stop at each business in town and determine whether the doors were locked, which didn't take long. I would drive the drunks home from the bars, or watch the fishing fleet leave the harbor in the darkness before dawn, or park in the woods and sleep—what was called "cooping." When all other forms of amusement failed me, I would open a drawer in one of the file cabinets that contained the department's records and look through the narrative of misfortune, poor behavior, envy, suspicion, and spite that they formed. If I found a file marked "Accidental Death" or "Suicide," I would read it and look at the photographs. In one such file were two photographs of a young man lying on a stretcher in a hospital hallway. He had been standing like a surfer on the roof of a car that was moving and had fallen off. He is looking into the camera in one of the photographs, and in the next one his eyes are closed and he is dead. The shock registered in the faces of the people standing beside him makes them look angry. In another file I found a



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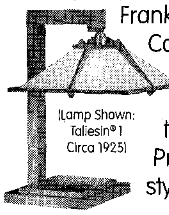

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photograph of a teen-age boy who had been drinking with friends in a car and had passed out. What I heard happened is that when his friends realized he was dead they stopped the car and pushed him out. In any case, he is on his back on the pavement. His knees are bent and his legs are in the air, as if he had been sitting. In the file of the man who hanged himself I found the note he had written to his wife, on the stationery of a cottage colony. It said:

> My Love,
>
> I have no excuses or explanations—I never have been able to give you all you deserve. Maybe this will all work out for the better for you.
>
> Don't stay here, sell all and get out—raise your dogs. This place will drag you down.
>
> I want no viewing services, the cheapest burial. . . . Tell the kids I love them and to hang in there with you. Tell Dad I can never thank him enough for all he has done.
>
> Your loving husband.

During the year that I spent as a policeman, three people killed themselves and two others tried. One of the unsuccessful ones took an overdose of drugs and had her stomach pumped. The other put the barrel of a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. The bullet came out the back of his neck. Of the two remaining suicides, one was a young man who drove his car deep into the woods and ran a hose from the tailpipe through one of the windows. The other was a young woman who hanged herself a few days before Christmas from a rafter in her house.

I saw the young woman the next day in the funeral home; I was a witness to the autopsy. She was lying on her back, naked, on a metal table, and there was a block of hard rubber underneath her neck to support her head. She was slim and she had long blond hair, a narrow face, and high cheekbones. Whoever cut her down had found her just after she died, so her neck was not swollen. It wasn't only because her hands were raised slightly that she seemed about to wake up. It was also her blue eyes. And her mouth's being open. When the doctor spoke her name, it seemed indiscreet—that is, it was hard to persuade myself that she didn't exist somewhere, that she wasn't listening.

ALL people probably share some impulse to self-destruction. What one person can bear another one can't. A few years ago, I was brooding over circumstances that had come to feel like an inescapable collection of obstacles in front of me. I felt sure that my affairs couldn't get better, that it was hopeless to try to improve them; even when I tried, the effort didn't seem to make any difference. As if a door had opened then or a curtain had been pulled back, I realized that if I killed myself these difficulties would end. I immediately felt the ease that I imagined I would feel if I opened an envelope and unexpectedly found a check, an inheritance, say, that left me free from ever worrying about money again. I had never thought of suicide before. No one in my family had ever killed himself. But I now felt that I knew how to manage everything. For months, I had not felt any respite from my anxieties, and now they were gone. Nothing could deflect or oppress or overwhelm me anymore. My spirits lifted so dramatically that I felt almost exalted. I had the answer and it was up to me and no one else to decide when to employ it. I had a power that I hadn't had before. I could choose the moment, and I could say goodbye and do whatever else I cared to and feel sure that everyone would remember me.

The suggestion had arisen from my unconscious, and I had entertained the thoughts that arrived after it in a state of mind that was something like a reverie. When I realized what I was thinking, I became frightened. Not because I had thought of killing myself—only the pure extroverts, who are capable of being in despair without knowing it, go through life without ever having such thoughts—but because the suggestion had brought about such a feeling of resolution and tranquillity, because I had embraced it. I knew that it was genuine, and not at all like sitting on my bed with the gun pressed to my temple and wondering what made people pull the trigger.

PROCEED AT OWN RISK_
KILLER BEES INSIDE.
WEBER

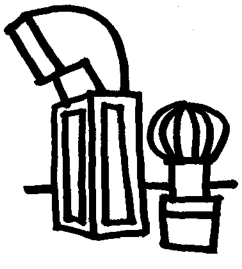
"You're so organized!"

WHAT it might have been like had I not turned back is something I thought I could only imagine until, reading "Voices of Death," by Dr. Edwin Shneidman, I found an account of a woman who had unexpectedly survived an attempt to kill herself. She had begun by taking barbiturates and had been found and brought to the hospital. When she recovered, her husband was unwilling to let her come home, because he was afraid that she might try again. The hospital set about finding a place where she could be kept safely for a while. "And I thought to myself, there's only one thing I can do," she told Dr. Shneidman. "I just have to lose consciousness. . . . The only way to lose consciousness, I thought, was to jump off something good and high. I just figured I had to get outside, but the windows were all locked. So I managed to get outside. . . . I just slipped out. No one saw me. . . . And I just walked around until I found this open staircase. As soon as I saw it, I just made a beeline right up to it. And then I got to the fifth floor and everything just got very dark all of a sudden, and all I could see was this balcony. . . . And the horribleness and the quietness of it. . . . Everything became so quiet. There was no sound. And I sort of went into slow motion as I climbed over that balcony. I let go and it was like I was floating. I blacked out. I don't remember any part of the fall. Just . . . just going. I don't remember crying or screaming. I think I was panting from the exertion and the strain of running up all those stairs. And then, when I woke up, I was having a dream, which seemed very weird. At that point I was in an intensive care unit and I was looking at the patterns on the ceiling."

I BECAME interested in suicide notes. I thought that they might convey a sense of what it is like to reflect on one's past in the company of death, that they might have a grandeur and clarity and contain revelations about the end of life that couldn't be found anywhere else.

From studies of suicide notes—especially those of Antoon Leenaars, Edwin Shneidman, Charles Osgood, Jacob Tuckman, James Conway, and Jerry Jacobs—I know that of any five people who kill themselves only one is likely to leave a note. Immigrants to America are more likely to sign their notes than people who were born here. Sometimes a person leaving a note for someone he is intimate with begins by writing Dear Mary, or Dear Michael, and ends by signing his full name—William H. Thompson, say—as if he were inscribing his tombstone. The reason that many notes are not signed may be that the dead person assumes that whoever finds him will know who he is, or it may be that someone about to end his life is unable or disinclined to comprehend a future in which he no longer exists.

Notes written on matchbooks, scraps of paper, receipts, pages torn from books and calendars, pieces of cardboard boxes, and on the backs of grocery lists are as common as notes written on stationery. They are written with crayons or markers or lipstick almost as often as they are with pens or pencils. Typewritten notes are uncommon. A priest once wrote a note on the wrapping of the rope he hanged himself with. A young woman wrote in the mud with her toe. A hunter wrote on the back of a shell box. A mechanic wrote on the wall of the garage where he worked. Sometimes the note is found with the body. Sometimes it is left on a table nearby or in a desk drawer or on a chair. People who asphyxiate themselves in a car sometimes leave a note in the glove compartment. Someone who has thought about suicide for a while might send a note through the mail.



More notes are written, perhaps, than are found. No one knows how many are suppressed to protect the standing or the feelings of someone mentioned in the note, to avoid a scandal, to interfere with the suicide's wishes concerning the manner in which he wants his possessions dispersed or the messages he wants delivered, to allow someone who has committed suicide to be buried in a churchyard, or to make a suicide appear to be a natural death for the purpose of defrauding an insurance company.

Notes are most often written by people who kill themselves by taking drugs. Sometimes a person writes a note after taking the drugs, and from the way that the shape of his letters deteriorates you can see when he lost consciousness. The handwriting of someone composing a suicide note doesn't usually resemble his regular handwriting. From the writer's anxiety and agitation, the characters in a suicide note tend to be made larger and on more of a slant. Homicide detectives know that someone concocting a fraudulent suicide note to conceal a murder is likely to imitate the dead person's handwriting exactly.

The tersest notes are written by people who choose the most violent means for their death. No one knows the difference between people who write notes and those who don't, but it may be simply that those who write them care more about being remembered.

A letter written early in the second millennium B.C. by a man in Egypt discusses suicide; if he went ahead and killed himself, it is the earliest suicide note anyone knows of. A copy of it, on papyrus, is in a museum in Berlin. A translator working in the nineteenth century gave it the title "The Dispute with His Soul of One Who Is Tired of Life." The letter is in two parts. In the first part, a man is talking with his soul. The Egyptians believed that a man's soul lived in his tomb and depended on his relatives for offerings. The soul appears to be persuading the man toward suicide. When the man agrees, the soul reverses itself and says that suicide would be a disaster, because no one would make offerings to such a contemptible person. Better times might lie ahead, the soul says. The man then describes how he feels now that his soul has abandoned him. The second part of the note contains four poems. One of them includes the stanza:

Death is before me today
As a man longs to see his house
When he has spent years in captivity.

While there are agreements on the form and the elements of every other kind of writing, there are none on what a suicide note should express or contain. One might expect that a suicide note, being in some sense the description of a compulsion, would be dramatic and original, but it usually isn't. Most suicide notes are rather flat in tone. The writing they contain is as compressed as the writing on postcards. It has taken years for the suicide to arrive at the point where he decides to kill himself, and now there seems nothing left to say, except whatever absorbs him at the moment, often simply an explanation of where some cash is to be found and whom it should go to, or an admonition such as "Don't let that rotten son of a bitch So-and-So get his hands on my car." The narrowed state of mind necessary to eliminate all possibilities except suicide is probably incompatible with a

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"What do you have in investment-grade reds?"

• •

thoughtful consideration of one's circumstances. It is as if, shortly before writing, the writer had disengaged himself from his past. What he appears to remember are only slights, disappointments, failures, and grievances. He is no longer the person he was—a catalogue of memories, gestures, habits, and accomplishments. He is now a collection of feelings and intentions collaborating on his demise. He is a version of one dimension of himself. Why he has decided to kill himself is straightforwardly plain to him—the irrefutable answer to a complicated equation that he believes no one else can understand. Perhaps for the only time in his life, he feels superior to the people who have thwarted him.

Norman Farberow, a doctor who has studied suicide notes, believes that there are five kinds: notes that blame someone, notes that deny that an obvious reason is the cause ("I did not kill myself because my wife left me"), notes that blame and deny ("My wife is to blame, but I did not kill myself because she left me"), notes that contain an insight ("Perhaps I gave her reason to leave me"), and notes that contain no explanation at all and have only instructions for the dispersal of property.

When I was describing my surprise at the notes' being so ordinary to an elderly friend of mine who is a novelist, he said, "If you were collecting love letters, you would have the same difficulty. Because people can't express their feelings. They go through life not being able to explain themselves, so it's no wonder that they can't at such an extreme. It's the absence of dignity that's the tragedy. They're behaving nobly under the weight of their concerns, but they can't see it. If they could only view themselves that way, they wouldn't be able to go through with it."

RECENTLY, I found a reference to a collection of suicide notes held in Windsor, Ontario, by Antoon Leenaars, a clinical psychologist. Windsor is on the south bank of the Detroit River, and it is about as close to Detroit as Brooklyn is to Manhattan. If you lived in Detroit, you might go to Windsor to gamble at the casinos by the river or to buy Cuban cigars.

Dr. Leenaars is forty-eight. He came to Canada with his parents from the Netherlands when he was a teen-ager. His archive, which he began in the eighties, is the largest of its kind: it includes about two thousand notes. The shortest is "Happy Father's Day," and the longest is four pages—a man's complaint over how he was treated by the company he worked for. Most of the notes were obtained from coroners. Typists whom Dr. Leenaars engages to transcribe the notes are often able to complete only a few notes at a sitting before they require consolation.

One morning, while he was engaged, I sat in a room in his office and copied the following notes in my notebook. Then later I changed the names:

> Actually I already died on Sunday morning. What will die tonight is only (finally) my body and my damned heart will finally stop beating like mad.
>
> Since Sunday my heart seems to be saying to me Mary you're still alive, but I have been thinking for a whole while, damned heart, why don't you stop beating so wildly?

> Mother, I know the words that I am about to write will never answer why or relieve any sorrow you may feel. These last 13 months of my life have been the most painful of my 30 years. I've been through so much that along the way I lost myself. This is the way I want it; if that will help. Unfortunately I must once more be faced what to do about loose ends.
>
> Most importantly Mom I want you to understand I must be cremated, not buried, and I do not want any kind of service! . . . No mourning or sadness. If you like, on my one year of being gone have a mass for my soul to be found. . . .
>
> Tender words only make matters difficult. I would like to say I love you and thank you for your love. Theresa.

> Life isn't worth the bother. I know I am a coward for taking the easy way out, but it isn't easy to kill yourself. About a month ago I told James that I was going to kill myself. I was drunk at the time. I am slightly drunk now. He talked me out of it. I gave him my army ring mainly so I would remember that he had a worse life than I have had so far. It is too late. I know I didn't say much, but I am in a hurry.

> I can't stand the thought of going to the

hospital and dying by inches.... This was done by my own hand.

My dearest Andrew, It seems as if I have been spending all my life apologizing to you for things that happened whether they were my fault or not.

I am enclosing your pin because I want you to think of what you took from me every time you see it.

I don't want you to think I would kill myself over you because you're not worth any emotion at all. It is what you cost me that hurts and nothing can replace it.

I can't begin to explain what goes on in my mind. It's as though there's a tension pulling in all directions. I've gotten so I despise myself for the existence I've made for myself. I've every reason for, but I can't see, to content myself with anything if I don't do this or some other damned thing. I feel as though I'm going to have a nervous collapse.

May God forgive me and you too my parents who have always tried so beautifully to understand me. It was futile for I never quite understood myself. I love you all very much. Ellen.

I'm sorry but I'm possessed by demons.

Lucy. Please don't come in. I suicide myself. Call the police. From Nancy's house.

Would you please put my blue suit on me with a white shirt and Susan's dad has my butterfly tie.... Also I would like to be smiling. And would like to have them play two songs for me. They are first the Marine Hymn. And play "A Dozen Roses." This one is the most important and has meant a lot to me. I will hear those songs and also see everyone.

I would like to be in Park View Cemetery as it is close to all my happy days and would like to have the same minister as Susan's mother had. My past should speak for itself so I don't believe they will have to ask for any forgiveness to get me into the next world.

Give my ring and watch to Tom. Sign the station over to Joe Wilson and be sure Susan is at my funeral, she at least owes me that much. I would like to lie beside Susan's mother, she did so much for me. I'm not a coward to do things this way. I am not ashamed and hope no one else will be ashamed of me....

I hope you are never allowed to forget what you've done to me. I can write this now and know that my last words will be (you know what?)

(I love you angel.)

I no longer live here. I am farther beyond than you can reach.

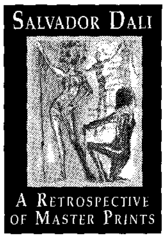
THE young man who asphyxiated himself in Wellfleet left a note. I have remembered it all these years. It was four pages long. On the first page was a drawing of a cross he designed for his grave. At the top of the cross he wrote "Behold." Along its arm he wrote "The Prophet Is Coming." He drew a line through "Prophet" and wrote "Messiah." Underneath he wrote his name, the date of his birth, and "Died." He was thirty years old.

After he had been missing for several days, his parents came to the police station. His father was an oysterman. They lived in a large white Victorian house with scrollwork and green shutters in a back part of town, beside the filling station where the police department bought its gas. Several of the policemen had grown up in Wellfleet—I had not—and had gone to school with the young man, and one of them, Paul Francis, remembered that he was fond of a part of the woods by the back shore. Before daylight on the morning after the oysterman and his wife had come to the station, Paul shone the spotlight on his cruiser up a sand road that was overgrown with oaks, and saw the tail-lights of a car. He waited until the sun rose to see if anyone was in it. "I wasn't going in there in the dark," he told me. "I saw the car and I went up to talk to him. Course he's dead, I knew it—I figured he was. I talked to him anyway, in case his spirit was still around."

The young man died in the spring. Since I had spent the fall and winter working mostly from midnight to eight, I had been given the day shift. By the time I arrived for work, his body had been delivered to the funeral home, and his car had been towed to a garage. For some reason, no one told me about it. As far as I knew, the young man was still missing. I rode with Chickie to the gas station. He told me to fill up the tank. Meanwhile, he walked across the parking lot to the oysterman's house. The oysterman and his wife were standing in their yard. I assumed that Chickie, who knew them, was saying that we were still looking for their son, or was asking if they had heard anything from him. After a moment, the woman's knees seemed to give way.

There weren't many oystermen left in town, and the father had been one his whole life and so was a figure of some stature, at least for me. About fifteen years ago, his car was found one morning after a snowstorm near a beach by the ocean. The car had broken down, and he'd left it and wandered into the woods and froze.

What I have remembered in particular since I read his son's note was one line: "Bury this body in the ground that I have suffered on." ♦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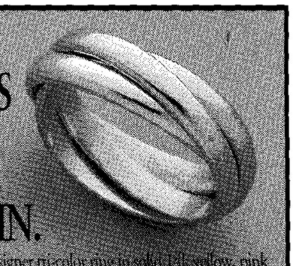

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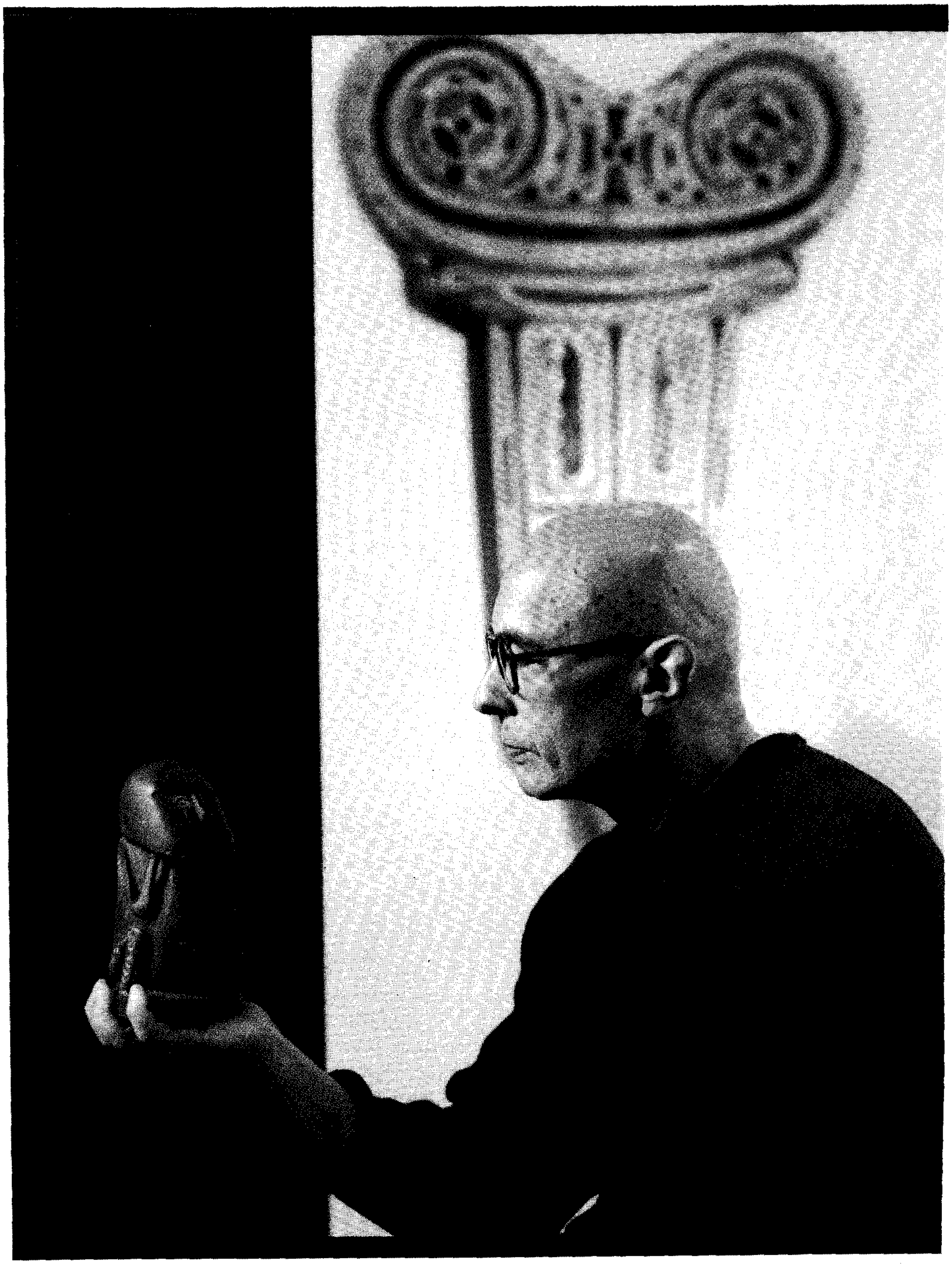
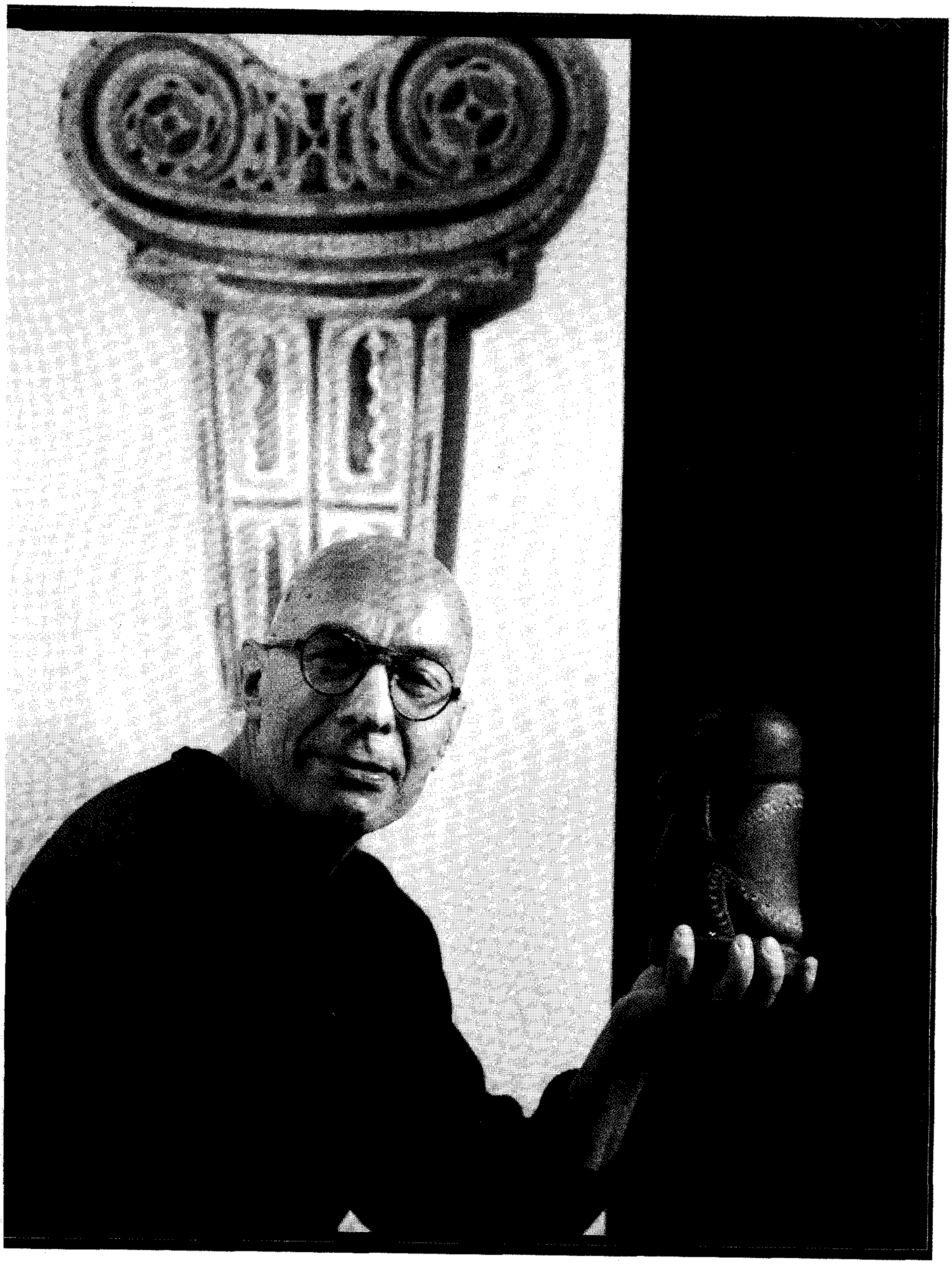


PROFILE

THE MAN WHO REMEMBERS

How a maverick from an Italian university came to hold the secrets of an endangered South Pacific people.

BY ALEXANDER STILLE



KITAWA is a tiny coral atoll at the outer edge of an archipelago known as the Trobriand Islands, some three hundred miles from Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. Small prop planes occasionally fly to the nearby island of Kiriwina, about eighteen miles away, which is the site of a Catholic mission. Yet almost no Westerners have ever made the trip from there to Kitawa, which can be a rough one, across open sea. In the spring and fall, when winds and currents are favorable, native islanders make the crossing in their long, sail-driven canoes.

When Giancarlo Scoditti, an Italian anthropologist, arrived in Kiriwina on his most recent trip, in December of 1997, trying to get to Kitawa for the tenth time, he was too impatient to wait for a canoe, so he hitched a ride on a catamaran headed in the same general direction. The boat's owner, an Australian, misjudged conditions, and the two men were caught in a ferocious storm. The radio was broken, and

Giancarlo Scoditti, with a wooden figure from Kitawa and Oceanic canoe-prow boards in the background. Photographs by Eileen Travell.

they had to lash themselves to the boat for two days. They were unable to sleep or eat. They were fortunate that the mast did not snap in the gale, or they might have drifted indefinitely, dying a slow death of starvation at sea.

Given the difficulties of getting there, it is not surprising that Scoditti, a slight, bespectacled man who teaches at the University of Urbino, is the first and only anthropologist to visit Kitawa. In fact, he has been going there for more than twenty-five years, making the art and culture of this island of roughly a thousand people his life's work. In the early nineteen-seventies, as a student in Italy and England, Scoditti had read everything he could about the island—all of it maddeningly secondhand. Bronislaw Malinowski, the pioneering anthropologist who first wrote about the Trobriand Islands in his classic 1922 text, "Argonauts of the Western Pacific," mentions Kitawa frequently as the source of beautiful carved prow boards and of an important local legend, "The Myth of the Flying Canoe." Yet Malinowski never got to the island.

When Scoditti set out for the first time to reach this place that had become so vivid in his imagination, he was warned off by the local inhabitants of Kiriwina, who told him that Kitawa was a dangerous place, home to "flying witches," the powerful female sorcerers who supposedly take the form of bats and move around by night, sowing disease and misfortune. Yet when Scoditti finally made it to Kitawa, the islanders were welcoming. Two years into the first visit, a powerful Kitawan sorcerer gave Scoditti the name by which he is known there to this day: Tororuwai, which means "the man who remembers." The islanders, who have no written language, were struck by the ability of this peculiar outsider, who was constantly scribbling in his notebook, to recall the tiniest details of their cultural rituals with extraordinary precision. Scoditti, for his part, marvelled at the ingenious strategies of an oral society for transmitting its culture and traditions intact from one generation to the next.

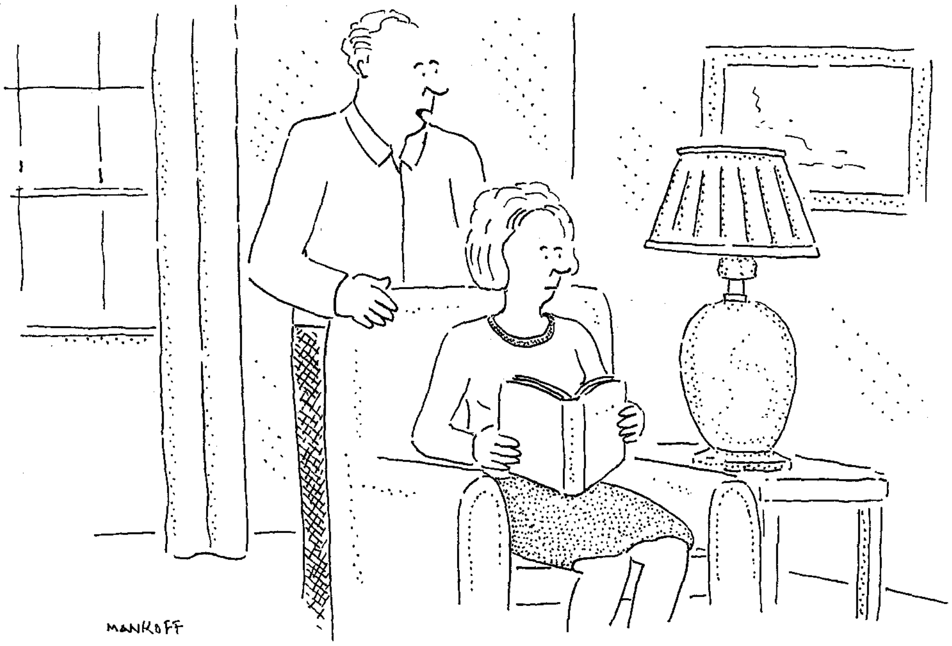
At the end of his second year, Scoditti was so happy on Kitawa that he was uncertain whether he wanted to return to Europe at all. Up to that point, he had been something of an eternal student, batting around universities in Italy and England, and finally, at thirty-five, he felt that he had found his place in life. But Towitara, the Kitawan artist and master craftsman with whom Scoditti had studied most closely, convinced him that he should leave. "He explained to me that my duty was to return and to try to conserve with documentation this culture that is gradually unravelling," Scoditti said. "Towitara saw this, although at that time the signs were not particularly evident." Since then, Towitara's worst fears have gradually come to pass, as Scoditti had occasion to observe on his last trip to the island.

Superficially, life on Kitawa has hardly changed. But the world around Kitawa has been altered dramatically. Some of the islands in the area now use motorboats instead of canoes, eat canned food or government-issue rice, and use Western tools and clothing. Seeing the erosion of traditional customs on neighboring islands, many Kitawans seem to be losing confidence in their own culture. None of the three villages on the island have held their traditional dances celebrating the harvest since about 1990. No one has commissioned a ceremonial canoe in several years.

The young people are particularly disaffected. Some are no longer willing to learn carving or work long hours in the fields cultivating yams, the principal source of food on the island. Some have even begun to steal, an unusual and alarming sign of social breakdown. On Scoditti's most recent trip to the island, he found the last oral poet on the island lying emaciated and alone in his thatched hut, unwilling to transmit his art to his son or to other young islanders, because they didn't appear to respect Kitawa's traditions.

Now that many of the artists, poets, wise men, and sorcerers that Scoditti interviewed in the seventies and eighties have either died or turned away in mute protest, some islanders who are curious about their own culture come to Scoditti with questions about the meaning of the words of a poem, the sequence of a dance ritual, or the magical formulas to be pronounced in a particular ceremony.

Oral societies, Scoditti has found, are both tremendously robust and extremely fragile. Until the arrival of Europeans, most Pacific islands had maintained their traditions from generation to generation for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. But contact with other cultures and technologies can cause the chain of knowledge to break down, and if one generation fails to transmit what it knows to the next millennia of ac-



"Now that the kids are grown and gone, I thought it might be a good time for us to have sex."

cumulated wisdom can be lost in a few decades.

METRO, THE GOD OF AMPLE PARKING, SPURNS MANHATTAN FOR NEW JERSEY'S MEADOWLANDS

Although the vast constellation of small islands that dot the South Pacific (generally called Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia) has a population of only a few million people, it is home to about a sixth of the world's sixty-five hundred languages. Because of the number of islands that have existed for centuries in comparative isolation, the region is to linguistic and cultural diversity what Madagascar or the Galápagos Islands are to biodiversity. And yet it is estimated that approximately half of the world's languages will disappear over the next century, as the pressures of a global economy further homogenize culture. Each one of these languages represents a world—and if the language happens to be unwritten that world will die with little trace. Thus Scoditti has become the sole repository of an entire civilization—a small but rich, vital, and ancient culture in imminent danger of extinction. He has come to fulfill Towitara's early vision of him: he is, indeed, the one who remembers.

Though nearly sixty and totally bald, Scoditti seems much younger than he is. He dresses as simply and casually as a graduate student, wearing bluejeans and carrying a backpack. He is thin and agile, from years of demanding field work. Scoditti is a very shy, introverted man who tends to eat his words when he speaks. Although he is a person of genuine warmth and unusual courtesy, an air of loneliness hangs about him, as if living between two societies has prevented him from putting down permanent roots in either one. His reticence and lack of facile urbanity give one the impression that, like Swift's Gulliver, Scoditti feels more at home on his travels than in "civilization."

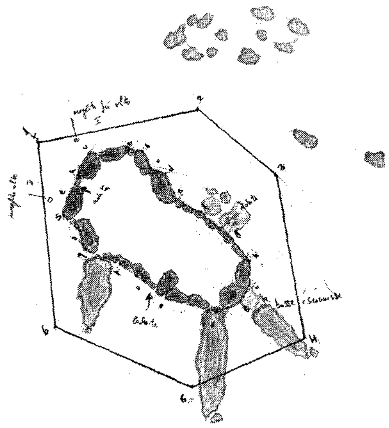
I first encountered Scoditti in New York, in 1996, when he spent a year as a visiting fellow of the Metropolitan Museum, and I met him again last year, when he returned as a visiting scholar at Columbia University. In between these two sojourns, he had made his nearly fatal trip to Kitawa. Over the past three decades, Scoditti has greatly expanded the West's knowledge of the remarkable seafaring culture among a group of islands, including Kitawa, that was first described by Malinowski. Twice a year, virtually all adult males set sail for other islands in order to participate in a series of ceremonial gift exchanges. This circuit of biannual migrations—and the elaborate customs that have grown up around it—is known to anthropologists as the Kula Ring.

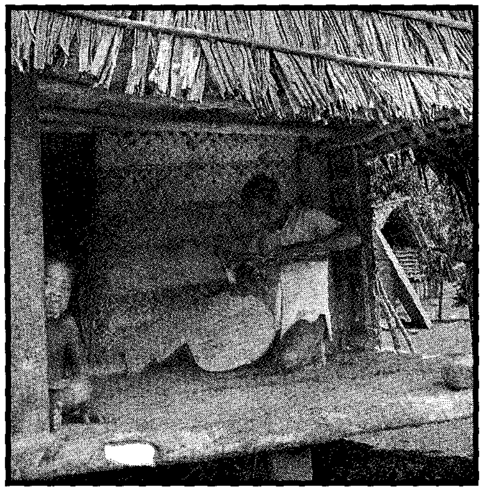
Malinowski's research was focussed on the social and sexual customs of the region; he had little interest in its artistic culture. Scoditti, however, was transfixed by the elaborately carved and decorated canoe-prow boards from the islands which he had seen in the Pigorini Museum, in Rome, Italy's national museum of ethnography. "The canoe is to these islands what the Gothic cathedral was to the people of the Middle Ages," Scoditti told me: it is the product of sustained collective effort and devotion, and also the visual expression of the community's world view.

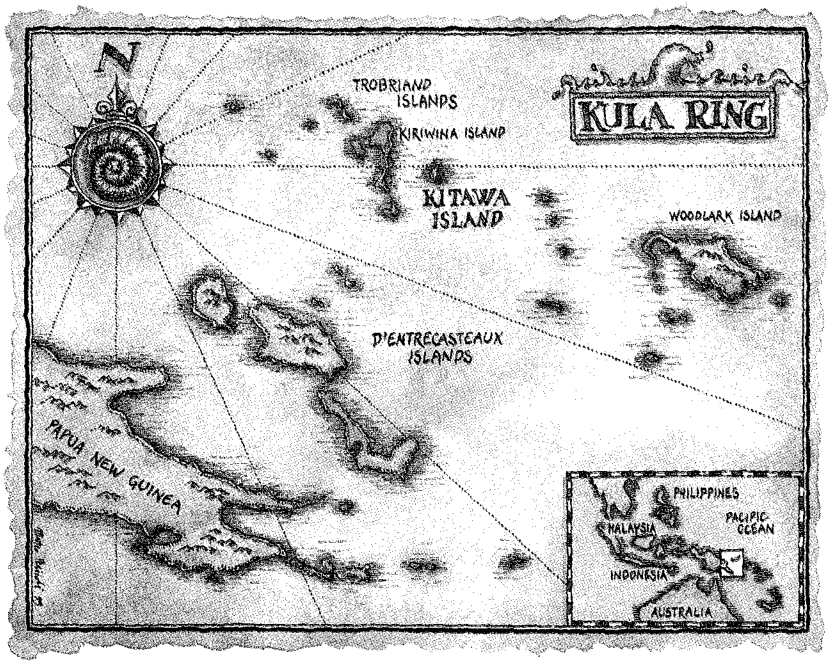
Scoditti attended university in Rome and did his graduate studies in London. Sir Edmund Leach, a Cambridge anthropologist who had studied with Malinowski, urged the young Italian scholar to pursue his interest in the aesthetics of Kitawa's canoes. Malinowski had met some Kitawans when they passed through neighboring islands on their travels, but they never took him to their home. "They would give him an appointment on the beach and then never show up," Scoditti told me, with amused satisfaction. Since Malinowski's diaries display an arrogant disdain for the native population, Scoditti would like to believe that the Kitawans picked up on this and, demonstrating a characteristic good sense, ditched the Anglo-Polish anthropologist.

OCEANIA is not a popular field of study at most universities, so Scoditti was travelling with money from his parents when he set off to reach Kitawa for the first time, in 1973. He planned to stay there for eight to twelve months. After all, Claude Lévi-Strauss, the great French anthropologist, wrote the books that made his reputation—"Tristes Tropiques" and "The Savage Mind"—based on quite scanty field work in the Amazon rain forest of Brazil.

It took Scoditti two months, however, just to find a boat that could take him from Kiriwina to Kitawa. Finally, an Australian government official agreed to transport him in a beat-up old motorboat with a crew of two or three local men. Scoditti's most powerful memories of that trip are the smell of gasoline and tobacco mixed with the sweet, narcotic odor of betel juice—the blood-red liquid of the betel nut, which the people







Clockwise from left: Towitara, the master craftsman with whom Scoditti studied, in 1973; a map of an excavation from Scoditti's 1977 journal; a section of the Kula Ring. After a year on Kitawa, Scoditti was invited to join the Kula, a ritual in which men travel by canoe to exchange gifts with people on other islands.

of the region chew constantly for its stimulating effect. It took about six hours to make the trip through a bad storm. Then, suddenly, Scoditti found himself approaching the island he had imagined for so many years. Roughly five miles long and three miles across, Kitawa looks a bit like a volcano that has been cut in half. Ringed by a thin band of white-sand beaches, a small mountain of coral rock rises up steeply from the shore and plateaus at about five hundred feet above sea level. The terrain is covered with dense jungle vegetation, and the whole island appears to be shrouded in mist, which adds to Kitawa's air of mystery and inaccessibility. The "mist" is actually smoke produced by farmers burning vines and weeds to keep the yam fields clear.

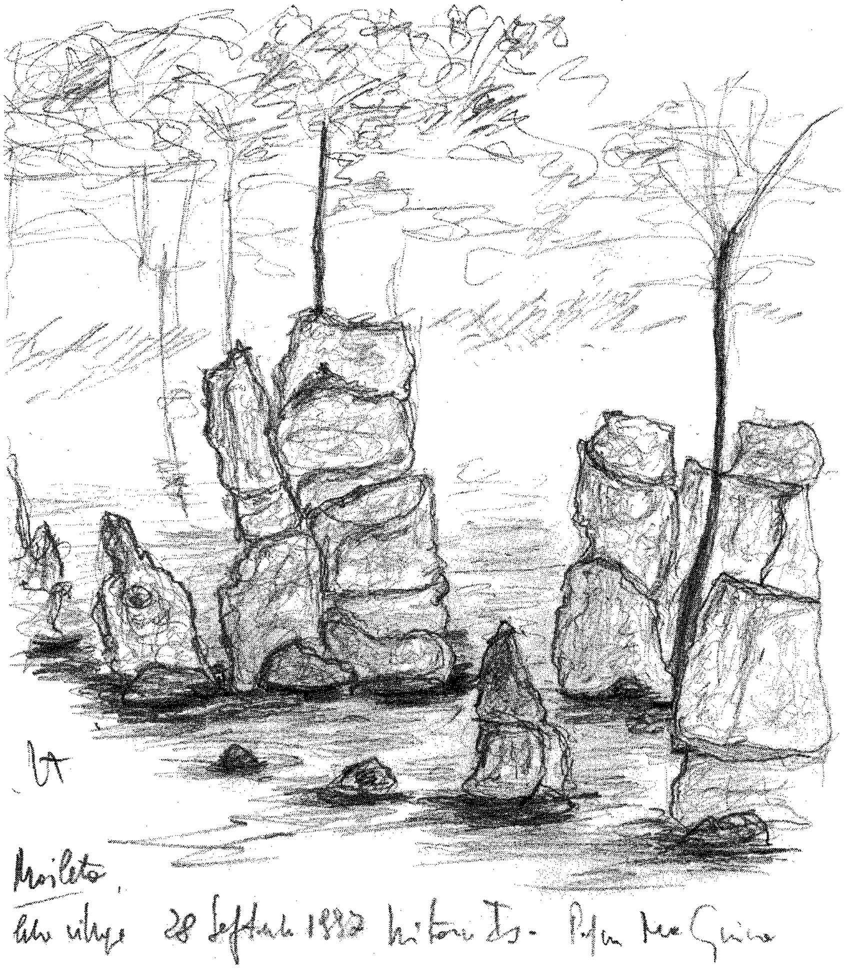
As the boat approached the island's western shore, Scoditti saw the thatched hangars that had been built to house the ceremonial canoes and he could discern the prow boards pointing out to sea. There were some Kitawan men on the beach, and the Australian explained to an interpreter he had brought along that Scoditti would be staying with them for a while. But he did not explain who Scoditti was or what he would be doing.

The Kitawans helped unload numerous heavy trunks containing Scoditti's food supplies, cameras, batteries, and other equipment. In total silence, since they had no language in common, Scoditti and this caravan of Kitawans trudged slowly up through the forest toward the village. "The island rises up gradually on five plateaus, and with each new plateau there was less of a breeze from the sea, and the forest seemed to close in on me," Scoditti recalled. "I felt a sudden sense of abandonment."

After about a forty-minute walk, they arrived at Kumwageya, which is one of three villages situated on the island's central plateau. About three hundred people—a third of the island's entire population—were living there, in orderly rows of huts that had been built on short stilts to protect the occupants against flooding and animals. Each hut had a thatched roof over its sleeping room and a small veranda for cooking, sitting, and receiving guests. The villagers gave Scoditti a hut that had probably been left empty after a recent death.

The villagers had never had a Westerner in their midst, though they had met a few at the Catholic mission in Kiriwina, and a few decades earlier an Australian trader had built a house on one corner of the island, where he lived for a while in comparative isolation. They expressed their curiosity about Scoditti by touching him. "They felt the soles of my feet, and they still do today," Scoditti said. The Kitawans, because they walk from childhood on coral stone, develop soles as hard as shoe leather, and they considered Scoditti's tender Western feet exotic and strange. "They find it extremely funny," he said. Scoditti did not find their curiosity at all threatening. "I never felt afraid of them. I was afraid of the nature. There were all these strange sounds that I had never heard before.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND SKETCHES: COURTESY GIANCARLO SCODITTI; MAP: MATTEO PERICOLI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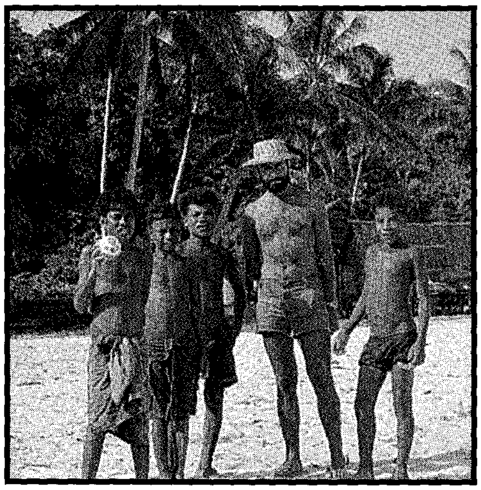


A drawing of the Kitawan landscape, left, which Scoditti made on a visit in 1997. It was through his obsessive sketching that the people first came to understand his interests. Above: Scoditti with Kitawan boys, in 1973.

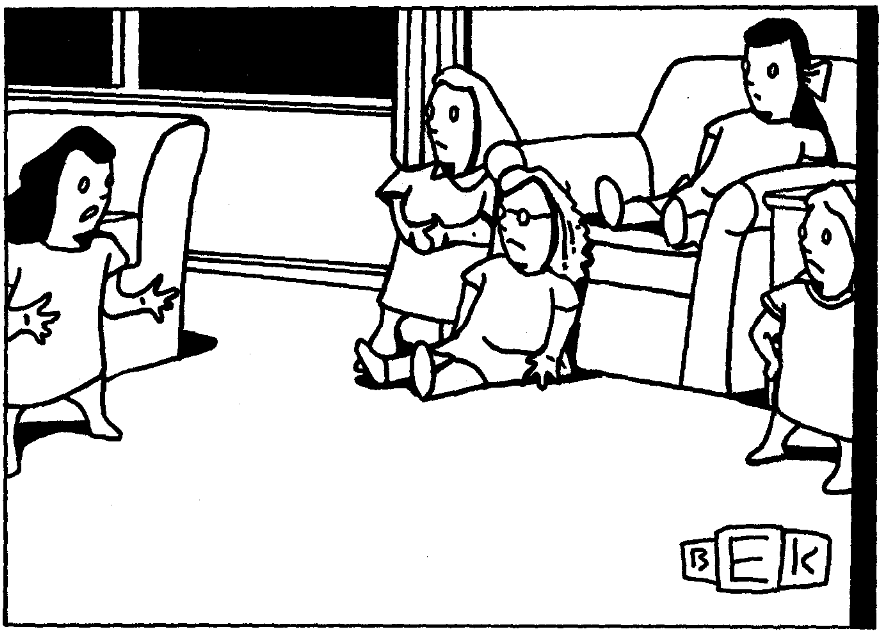
They then left me in this hut. I slept very little."

As an intellectual and rather impractical young man, Scoditti had asked his advisers everything possible about research methodology but not a single question about the problems he would encounter living on a remote Pacific island, such as how he would eat, drink, wash, shave, or go to the bathroom without any means of communicating with his hosts. The villagers kindly brought him baked yams and fresh water. "They never let me lack for anything," Scoditti said. It was a courtesy that Scoditti grew to appreciate greatly, since food can be scarce, and women and children had to cart heavy vessels of water up from wells near the beach every morning.

Scoditti found his new surroundings far richer and more fascinating than the world he had read about in Malinowski. "That man had no aesthetic sense; it's as if he were color-blind," Scoditti said. "Reading Malinowski where he talks of the canoe-prow boards or the dances, one sees a world of absolute grayness. I was overwhelmed by the colors and the vivacity of everything." Shortly after his arrival, ceremonial dances were held in a nearby village called Okabulula. In the hours before the dances, the young people of the village decorated their bodies and painted their faces black and white. In their thick, frizzy hair they put bright-yellow feathers, which stuck straight up, forming a luminescent crown meant to represent the rising sun, as Scoditti would learn with time.

BACK in the slick, modern offices of the Institute for Italian Studies at Columbia University, Scoditti and I watched videotapes of the dances he had filmed many years before. The dancers form a spiral, which begins with the best and tallest dancers and gradually descends to the smallest and least experienced. The spiral resembles a particularly prized shell found in the area, the *Nautilus pompilius*, which unfolds, as Western scientists have discovered, in a mathematically precise pattern. The Kitawans regard this shell as a symbol of perfection, and they also feature its spiral on their prow boards. To Scoditti, the spiral is a metaphor for Kitawan culture as a whole: it moves forward and out from its point of origin, while always circling back around it. As we watched, the line of dancers turned, and the spiral opened and closed like a living organism.

The period of the dances is also marked by what Scoditti calls "nights of love"—a time of sexual liberty, in which unmarried boys and girls are free to pair off and make love without any subsequent commitment. "At the end of the harvest, as they celebrate the new year and just before the start of the dances, during the evening they play the drums and the young men and women make love freely," he explained. Malinowski, in his book "The Sexual Life of Savages," appeared scandalized by the sexual customs in Melanesia. "He was a devout Catholic and describes them as totally depraved," Scoditti said. "It all seemed perfectly natural to me." Sco-



"I thought it would be nice if we had a forum where we could get together and have screaming tantrums."

ditti eventually figured out that this freedom during the nights of love went hand in hand with considerable sexual restrictions during the rest of the year. It was a sort of sexual pressure valve for a small, highly regulated society, in which—for reasons of genetic diversity—people are forbidden to marry anyone inside their own sub-clan and are discouraged from marrying anyone within their own clan.

When the initial excitement of discovery wore off, Scoditti began to slip into a severe depression, overwhelmed by a sense of isolation and abandonment. He had no means to express his humblest needs—or even to distinguish a noun from a verb. The Australian had promised to come back and check on him, but as the weeks and months passed it became clear that the man would not return. After the late-summer rains, Scoditti caught malaria and sweated through long nights of fever. He was then preyed upon by thousands of tiny insects, and when he scratched the bites his legs became red, bloated, and immobile. Living on a monotonous diet of yams, he suffered from protein deficiency and became extremely weak. He was convinced that he would die alone on the island. For a time, he wept from despair and contemplated suicide. His Kitawan neighbors noted his distress but had no way to comfort him.

Scoditti took quinine pills to combat the malaria; a village sorcerer treated his legs with a plaster that brought down the swelling. When he was able, Scoditti began to spend long days on the beach, drawing the ceremonial canoes and prow boards he had come to study. From his obsessive sketching, the Kitawans began to understand something of his interests. After about six months, he started to pick up the language, and began to form relationships with the master carvers. Once they understood the nature of his work, they welcomed him into their society. With this breakthrough, Scoditti's mood turned from depression to joy, made all the sweeter by the depth of his earlier despair. Suddenly, he was face to face with many of the things that Malinowski had only heard stories about. He observed the impressive spectacle of the cutting and carving of a ceremonial canoe, which is an extraordinary example of collective labor and masterly, low-technology engineering.

"I will never forget the first time I witnessed the cutting of a canoe," Scoditti told me. "It was perhaps the most moving thing I had ever seen." A ceremonial canoe is sixty or seventy feet long and can carry forty men. Creating a new one is an expensive enterprise, which involves the entire village. "There are lots of stories about clans that have been ruined by commissioning a canoe," Scoditti said. The first step is to choose an extremely tall, solid tree, since the main hull is composed of a single, dugout tree trunk. Then, he said, "there is a series of poetic formulae that are recited to the spirits of the woods—mischievous little spirits—that say, 'Come down from the tree, because tomorrow I am going to cut it.' " The biggest challenge is getting the tree from the middle of the forest to the beach, which is often a few miles away. Scoditti watched in amazement as the Kitawans created a kind of "road in the air," using vines, ropes, and ramps to lift the tree and direct it through the forest to the shore without its ever touching the ground. "It was an incredible piece of engineering," Scoditti said. "The whole process is highly ritualized, with chants of encouragement."

Moreover, when Scoditti saw this huge tree moving along the top of the forest, the central legend of the Kula Ring, "The Myth of the Flying Canoe," took on new meaning. In the myth, a hero-ancestor insists on carving his canoe in the middle of Kitawa, even though the villagers warn him that he won't be able to get the heavy boat to the shore. When the work is done, the hero-ancestor invites everyone to get into the canoe and uses powerful magic to send them flying down to the ocean and then racing past all other canoes on the Kula circuit. Malinowski traced the myth to Kitawa, but never got to see, as Scoditti did, how the myth must have originated.

Once the huge tree is on the beach, the trunk is hollowed out, and prow boards are commissioned from the master carvers, who enjoy a position of special prestige on the island. All the canoe-builders are spared the duty of working in the fields and are plied with yams and fresh fish in order to keep them happy. The undisputed master of Kumwagea, the village where Scoditti lived, was an elderly man named Towitara. Scoditti had noticed him soon after he arrived on the island. Although Towitara was not the chief of the village, he clearly occupied a special role in the community.

"He was tall and thin, almost six feet, and, like other old people, he never wore anything more than a white loincloth, rain or shine, even in the colder months, like January and February," Scoditti said. Towitara walked with a dignified bearing and held his hands behind his back. In the evenings, he would step out of his hut and speak to a group of villagers. As Scoditti began to master the language, he discovered that these evening talks were jeremiads meant to keep the community in line. "He would say things like 'This person has been neglecting his duties in the fields' and 'The hut of one of the older people is falling apart and should be rebuilt,' " Scoditti explained.

Although Kitawans do not count the years, Scoditti guesses that Towitara must have been in his eighties. Yet he still had a steady hand, and carved with great strength and precision. On the island, the carvers are something like a secret society, with special initiation rites, strict dietary rules, and many years of hard training. (Families court the master carver with gifts and food, in the hope that he will take one of their sons as an apprentice.) Even so, Towitara seemed to understand immediately the importance of imparting his secret knowledge to Scoditti, in order to preserve it for posterity. Under the cover of darkness, Towitara would visit him in his hut, and they would talk well into the night. The deep intelligence that Scoditti found in Towitara reminded him of the great art historian Sir Ernst Gombrich, who had been one of his mentors in England. "In both Towitara and Gombrich I felt I touched real wisdom," Scoditti told me.

Towitara had a remarkable ability to explain the symbolism of the prow boards and the meaning of Kitawan rituals in ways that were comprehensible to Scoditti's Western mind. "The Kitawans have very definite ideas about why something is beautiful or ugly, well made or poorly made, and why," Scoditti said. "I found it extremely interesting to understand the aesthetic principles that made an object more or less beautiful." Towitara and other islanders were also quick to grasp the potential of written language, though they had never been exposed to it before. "They immediately saw the fascination of writing as a powerful device of memory," Scoditti said. The Kitawans wanted to be sure that Scoditti would publish his research in English, even though no one on Kitawa could speak it or read it. "We don't know English, but our grandchildren might," they said.

Scoditti was especially impressed by the infinite strategies that Kitawan society had devised for preserving its traditions. "There is an incredibly complex system of control—one clan is responsible for the dance, another for the self-decoration of the body, a third for the music, and so on," he explained. In a kind of system of checks and balances, each clan carefully watches and scrutinizes the others, commenting on whether a particular dance or song was well executed. Nor is the transmission of important myths or stories left to chance; they are actually the "property" and responsibility of specific individuals, who pass them on to their heirs. "When someone tells you that a story is 'true,' he means that that person is the true 'owner' of the story, and therefore it is authentic," Scoditti said.

Even an instance of cannibalism which Scoditti observed was actually a memory device. When the beloved son of an older man died, the family removed the young man's head and boiled it in a pot. The father drank the soup made from the head, and then the family placed the skull inside their hut. "The father would take it out from time to time and hold the skull in his hands, a little like Hamlet in the graveyard scene," Scoditti explained. "It was a reminder of the dead son, the way a photo album would be for us." Still, he added, "I could not hide a sense of physical revulsion at this. But my friends reproached me for it and explained the meaning of this custom." (All acts of cannibalism were banned by the government of Papua New Guinea in 1975.)

When Scoditti had lived on Kitawa for nearly a year and solidified his friendship with Towitara, he was included in the Kula Ring. He joined the other men in the festive rituals of decorating their canoes, bathing their bodies in sweet-smelling oils, smoking tobacco, chewing betel nut, and singing songs meant to insure an auspicious journey. "I was euphoric," Scoditti said. "There is a great sense of adventure and of confronting the challenge of nature. It is a trial you must overcome, showing that

"This is my client's videotaped deposition—please be considerate and rewind after viewing."

you know how to read the stars and recognize the currents." Each trip is a test of skill and endurance, sometimes requiring two days and one night of travel, with all the sailors awake in the crowded, narrow canoe, passing through rough seas and dangerous storms.

Through these voyages, the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands relive the experience of their ancestors, the intrepid explorers who settled these remote islands—probably, in some cases, by force. "When you arrive in a village, you make noise and a little disturbance," Scoditti said. "You might throw stones against a hut. I've often seen people destroy a hut. The village knows that 'they've arrived for the Kula!' "

THE Kula Ring is a truly ingenious social institution, which has fascinated anthropologists for decades. Each person in the Kula has a number of partners with whom he exchanges gifts—either arm bracelets, made by breaking off the top of a conelike white shell (the *Conus millepunctatus*), which are greatly prized ornaments throughout Papua New Guinea, or necklaces made from the red spondylus shell. When the Kitawans travel east, in early spring, they give away the red-shell necklaces and receive white-shell arm bracelets. When they travel west, in the fall, they give away the arm bracelets they received earlier in the year and receive necklaces they will distribute on their next voyage east. Thus, at least in theory, in the course of a year all the men would have travelled the entire circuit and all the gifts would have changed hands.

Though the exchange is strictly formalized, there is also an element of sport and competition to it. The boats race to arrive first at a particular island, and individuals vie to collect more gifts than their neighbors. Although you are supposed to give away all the bracelets or necklaces you receive, the way you distribute them among individual partners is discretionary. "A person receives more gifts if he has prestige or if he is eloquent and able to tell stories," Scoditti said. To introduce Scoditti into the Kula, Towitara gave him two of his own trading partners.

On one of his first ceremonial trips, Scoditti found himself back on Kiriwina, the island from which he had embarked for Kitawa. He even saw the Australian who had dropped him off and had failed to return. The man did not apologize for his conduct but offered Scoditti a bed in his home, assuming that he would prefer Western-style comfort to sleeping on the beach with the Kitawans. "I told him I would rather stay with my friends," Scoditti said. Now that he had a chance to return to the West, he had no particular desire to do so.

Scoditti began to participate fully in Kitawan life, and even took a wife. He had noticed an attractive young woman named Kabata, and eventually spoke of his interest to a friend. The marriage was arranged through her maternal uncle. Marriage is a relatively low-key affair in Melanesia, and in this case, once it was agreed upon, Kabata simply moved into Scoditti's hut. The match was treated as perfectly ordinary by most Kitawans, with one notable exception. "Towitara had a lot to say about it," Scoditti told me. The carver saw that it was unrealistic for Scoditti to imagine he could be happy living forever on Kitawa. Moreover, he was concerned that Scoditti not lose sight of his initial objective—making a permanent record of Kitawan culture.

Towitara was right, and after nearly two years on the island Scoditti decided to return to Europe and complete his doctorate. Shortly before leaving, at the end of 1974, he had a series of intense conversations with Towitara, in which the master revealed the poetic incantations of the carvers' initiation ceremony. Scoditti translated part of it as follows:

> My mind, enveloped, creates images,
> lost in dreams will create images—
> images for our companions.
> You are transformed into me.
> You are transformed into me, Towitara.

Towitara had refused to impart this formula to his favorite pupil, Togaruwa, because the young artist had disobeyed the dietary rules of the master carver. "They believe that if you eat the tail of a fish your carving hand will shake like the tail of the fish," Scoditti explained. "And if you eat a boar's intestines your symbols will be confused like the boar's intestines."

Scoditti went on to say, "My departure was a kind of epic scene. Practically the entire island was there. Lots of women were crying. I was crying. To-

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SHOWCASE BY ROBERT POLIDORI

ACCIDENTAL PIAZZA

THE great urbanologist William H. Whyte, who died last month, was right in observing that urban spaces only begin to matter when there are people in them. But the most astonishing space in midtown Manhattan right now has no people in it at all, save for a handful of construction workers, and it never will, so long as it lasts. The space is the square block bounded by Madison and Vanderbilt Avenues and Forty-sixth and Forty-seventh Streets, which until recently was occupied by a twelve-story office building. A pair of developers have just torn the building down so that they can erect a forty-three-story headquarters tower for Bear Stearns in its place. It is too soon to say anything about the new building, which is being designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, but what is clear is that in removing the old one the demolition crews have created one of the most beautiful rooms in New York.

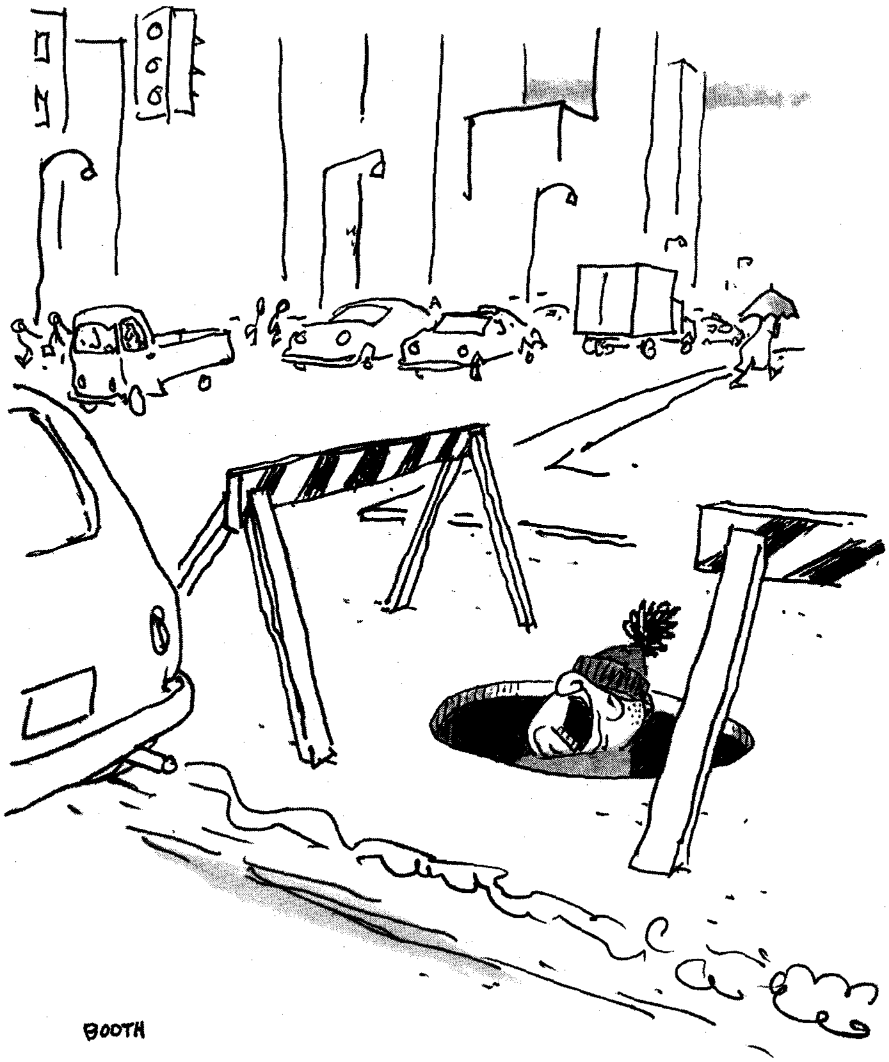
All urban squares are rooms, and most of them are meticulously planned. Even Bryant Park and Washington Square Park, Manhattan's grandest surviving squares, are lined with buildings whose architects were conscious that they were creating walls to enclose open space. But at Madison and Forty-sixth the square is more serenely proportioned, and more grandly self-assured, than almost any of the others. The east side is marked by the back of 250 Park Avenue, a 1925 building by Cross & Cross that looks as though it had been waiting for three-quarters of a century to have the pride of place befitting a front. The south side is marked by the north side of the Roosevelt Hotel, designed by George B. Post & Sons, which is equally deserving of façade status. But more wonderful still are the views of familiar buildings, suddenly visible from new angles. Look to the southeast and there is a diagonal view of the Helmsley Building. Look to the northwest to see the slab of 30 Rockefeller Plaza exposed as it has never been before. And in the middle of it all a *piazza temporanea* that transforms the city around it. —PAUL GOLDBERGER

MetLife

witara was crying. In the water up to his chest, he gave the last push to the canoe. 'Come back, and don't forget the island,' he said. We set off in three canoes, about sixty men with all these trunks."

WHEN Scoditti returned to Italy, his family was surprised to see him. They had convinced themselves that he was lost or dead or had simply decided never to come home. Scoditti's older sister, Maria Teresa, told me, "My mother used to say, half-joking, 'They're probably eating him piece by piece.'" Indeed, his father seemed puzzled and almost disappointed when Scoditti turned up. "Why did you come back?" his father asked him, perhaps thinking of an extended absence of his own after the Second World War. Americo Scoditti had been an officer in the Italian Army; he was captured by the British in North Africa and sent to a British prisoner-of-war camp in India, where he converted to Hinduism. He was so taken with his new religion that when the war ended, rather than return to his wife and small children, he disappeared into the Himalayas on a spiritual quest. A year or two later, he returned to his previous life in Anzio, a seaside town south of Rome. He remained a practicing Hindu, however, and the whole episode cast a pall over Giancarlo's childhood.

During the next several years, Scoditti worked on his dissertation about the Kitawan prow-board carvers, and he made frequent trips back to the island for further research. As he expected, Towitara had died by the time he returned a year later, but Scoditti continued his work with the dwindling core of master carvers. He recorded all his interviews with them, conducted an extensive analysis of the language, and even created a dictionary of Nowau (the principal language of the island). In 1990, this research, along with part of his thesis, was published under the title "Kitawa: A Linguistic and Aesthetic Analysis of Visual Art in Melanesia." In a foreword to the book, the art historian Gombrich compared Scoditti's carefully recorded dialogues with Kitawan artists to a famous seventeenth-century diary in which the Frenchman Paul de Chantelou took down his conversations with the great Italian sculptor-architect Gianlorenzo Bernini. "If we have reason to be grateful to the French art-lover . . . how much more must we and posterity be beholden to Giancarlo Scoditti who spared no effort and shrank from no hardship to seek out and preserve the thoughts and practices of the craftsmen who produced the beautiful prows of canoes for their tribe in the remotest islands of the South Seas," Gombrich wrote.



"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

On Scoditti's first trip back to Kitawa, in 1976, he discovered that he had a son who had been born after his departure, in 1974. Scoditti, who is extremely reticent about personal matters, says only that Kabata eventually found another husband, on a nearby island. There are no prohibitions against divorce and remarriage in Melanesia, and since Scoditti had clearly chosen to base his life in Italy, and not in Kitawa, he understood Kabata's decision. But he also made the decision not to get involved with any other women on Kitawa, not wanting to fall into the typical Western habit of using the Pacific islands for sexual tourism. Yet the amount of time and energy he devoted to Kitawa made it difficult for him to maintain a long-term relationship in Europe. Although Kabata had moved away, their son had remained on the island, to be reared by his mother's family, and that gave Scoditti another reason to return regularly.

In the mid-eighties, Scoditti started a book on the poetry of the island. As in most oral societies, poetry is an extremely important part of life on Kitawa, central to all its rituals and events. Much of the poetry about the voyages of the Kula Ring has an erotic quality:

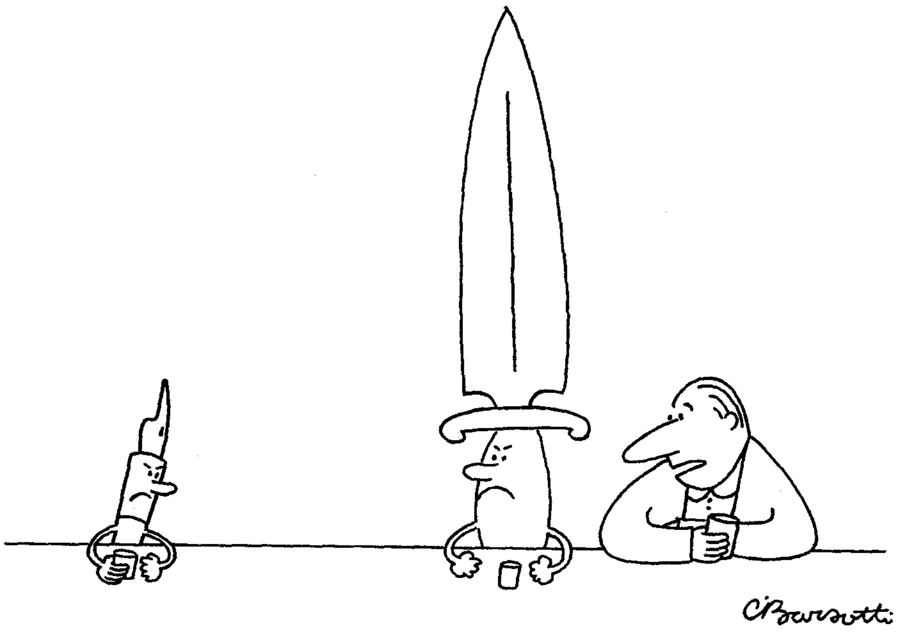
I shall set sail against the waves in the festive canoe:
raising the pole high, I shall thrust it into the sea;
as I stand there the village in the west will appear,

a light wind will stretch the sail,
there is the magic mountain: come toward me,
surround me, fight if you desire me,
and, like a breath, flow to the distant transformed island.
I am water, I am shell, I yield myself to this seduction.

Gradually, Scoditti began to enjoy a position of privilege in Kitawan society. Knowing that he was creating a permanent record of their culture, the most important people on the island were keen to have their own points of view represented. Scoditti even persuaded the sorcerers and witches to reveal the magic spells they were used to muttering sotto voce. "I moved around a lot at night," Scoditti told me. "The night is sort of reserved for the witches and sorcerers. It has a kind of political and diplomatic function. The sorcerers defend their village against the activity of the others. I was a kind of passe-partout who could go anywhere."

The Kitawans loved to hear their voices played back on the tape recorder. "They wanted to hear it again and again," Scoditti said. "I would have to say no, because the batteries were being used up, and they complained. Yet when one of my technological devices fails to work, they find it extremely funny. They have a very curious and ironic attitude toward Western technology."

With each successive trip, Scoditti augmented his impressive collection of objects from the islands, and the Pigorini Museum, in Rome, became interested in his work. But, to Scoditti, his collaboration with the Pigorini demonstrated the pitfalls of collecting art from Oceania. The director of the museum persuaded Scoditti to bring back a ceremonial canoe for the museum's collection. They were willing to pay for it, but Scoditti explained that people on Kitawa had no use for money. He would have to persuade the islanders to give him the canoe, and he would, in turn, donate it to the museum.



"You'd better cool it. Remember what he did to you last time."

Scoditti was delighted when he was able to obtain the canoe for which Towitara had carved his final prow board—a beautiful boat, about sixty feet long, with a red hull. He brought it to Port Moresby, and let the Italian officials arrange for its transfer to Rome. After more than a year, he was informed by the head of the museum that the canoe had arrived. But when the boat was unwrapped Scoditti protested, "This is not my canoe!" The boat that had been shipped was smaller and less beautiful and didn't have the skillful work by Towitara that Scoditti had so painstakingly documented. "The director of the museum said to me, 'Well, so what? It's still a canoe. One canoe is as good as another,'" Scoditti said. "And I was furious." Eventually, he heard that Towitara's canoe was in a museum in Japan. Apparently, a member of that museum's staff saw Scoditti's canoe in Port Moresby, decided he liked it, and managed to engineer a switch for an inferior canoe. Scoditti demanded that the Italian curators get it back. "I told them that if they didn't I was going to take it all to the press and create a nice scandal!" he said. Finally, Italian officials were able to persuade the Japanese museum to return Scoditti's canoe, and today it sits in a place of pride in the lobby of the Pigorini. Nevertheless, Scoditti regrets having given it to the museum. "It is exposed to drafts and is badly in need of conservation," he said.

For now, the rest of Scoditti's collection remains at his home in the Alban hills outside Rome. (For reasons of security, Scoditti asked me not to name the town.) He lives in a five-room apartment in an unremarkable middle-class housing complex, but as soon as you enter the front door the apartment loses any resemblance to its surroundings. It is jammed with orderly clutter. Scoditti's two main preoccupations—books and the art of Papua New Guinea—war for space, covering every available surface in room after room. Many of the walls in the apartment are covered by floor-to-ceiling bookcases; in fact, even the front door is a bookcase that opens like the trick library door in old detective films. On the remaining walls and on top of some of the bookcases are a small museum's worth of exotic objects. In both the study and the living room, there are enormous masks from the Sepik region of New Guinea: between four and six feet long, they are thin abstractions of the human face which were made to stand guard over storehouses of yams. From Kitawa, there are small wooden sculptures and some finely carved ebony mortars and pestles, used to grind betel nuts. On top of a revolving bookcase there is an extraordinary food bowl, for special feasts, which is some three feet across and is carved from a single piece of wood. On top of other revolving bookcases Plexiglas cases hold tiny wooden models that Kitawa's master carvers made before carving a ceremonial canoe. In one of the bedrooms there is a little wooden basin, in the shape of a canoe, that was used to wash a newborn baby. Real canoes are sometimes used as coffins for distinguished members of the community. On Kitawa, people are born in canoes and are buried in them when they die.

Scoditti also has sixteen volumes of field notes, more than a hundred tapes, thousands of photographs, and three hours' worth of sixteen-millimetre film of Kitawa's poetry, dance, storytelling, and celebrations. Because he insists that the ethnographic material cannot be separated from the artifacts, he has had trouble finding a permanent home for his collection. A number of museums in the United States want the art but are not prepared to take on the financial responsibility of housing and curating all the other material. Although there is a boom in non-Western art at many museums, the art of Oceania is something of a poor cousin, in part because it has no local constituency lobbying for it, as collections in African, South American, and Asian art do. "The Peabody Museum, at Harvard, would like the collection, but they told me I have to find a sponsor who will fund it. So I am supposed to give the art and then find the money to maintain it," he said.

SHOT GLASS

I'll never forget the day this beautiful woman
right out in the office said I was "sneaky":

I didn't know I was sneaky: I didn't feel
sneaky: but there are mechanisms below our

mechanisms, so I assume the lady was right:
living with that has not helped my progress

in the world, if there is any such thing,
progress, I mean: also it has hurt my image

of myself: I have used up so much fellow-
feeling on the general—all of which I have

forgotten specifically about, as have the
fellows—no offices, no clear images or

demonstrations—I don't understand why that
one remark holds its place ungivingly in me:

and now to talk about it, admit to the world
(my reading public, as it happens) that I am

scarred by an old, old wound about to heal and
about to bleed: this may do confessional good

WHEN Scoditti visited Kitawa last winter, he went to see Ipaiya, the island's most revered poet, and found him lying alone in his hut, old, blind, and bitter. "I am waiting for death. I hope someone poisons me," Ipaiya told him. Scoditti asked him to perform one of his songs, to see if the lyrics were the same. But Ipaiya refused. "My voice is weak and ugly," he said. "I've sung all I could. Leave me." Ipaiya said his son did not give him enough food, "and he avenges himself by not giving the son his poetic formulae," explained Scoditti, who sees more and more evidence that Kitawa's traditional culture is eroding.

The island remains a subsistence agricultural economy, with no money, no electricity, and no means of communication with other islands except by canoe. Yet the outside world has begun to intrude in curious, indirect ways. "They are attracted to plastic—which I despise—in an almost morbid fashion, because it is strong and lasts," Scoditti said. "It is the dream of every Kitawan woman to own an aluminum pot. They are crazy about Western shoes, even though they make their feet hurt terribly." These would be harmless enough passions, except that as the islanders trade more and more of their food surplus for manufactured goods there is less food for the older members of the community, like Ipaiya, who can no longer work.

At the same time, Western ideas are seeping in, largely through the efforts of Christian missionaries. In 1975, Papua New Guinea became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth; as a result, Christianity is now its principal religion and English its first language. At the moment, about half of the population is Christian and about half is literate, and reading and writing are almost invariably introduced in the form of Bible study. The Catholic Church, in Scoditti's experience, tends to respect local customs, but the evangelical Protestant missionaries are quite ruthless about trying to discourage such traditional practices as dancing or the Kula exchange. "They know that the sorcerers recite magic spells for the ceremonial exchange, and so they prohibit it," Scoditti explained. "They try to inculcate the fact that it is an extremely grave sin to recite magic words." In some cases, he added, the evangelicals use Western medicines as a bribe. "There is a lot of implicit blackmail," he said. " 'You come to school, I'll give you quinine.' "

Since the early nineteen-eighties, a few of the Kitawan children have been sent to Christian missions on other islands for an education. "Very few get to high school," Scoditti said. "They manage to pick up certain Western values and desires but are unable to realize them. They return to the island, but they aren't able to fish and sail and aren't able to cultivate yams. They become a deadweight on the society. Some begin to steal." As a result, there is a small but growing group of disaffected young people who have refused to participate in the village assemblies or in the traditional dances, which the missionaries regard as heathen. Much to Scoditti's chagrin, his

but I will no longer appear perfect to others:
conceivably, that could be a good thing:

others may be scarred, too, but who wants to
be like them: one should: perhaps I really

do, because lonely splendor is devastatingly
shiny but basically hard and cold, marble

walls and glistening floors: one comfort,
which I am reluctant to relish, is that the

lady is now dead—surely, I am sorry about that,
she was a person of intelligence and

discernment, which is one reason she hurt me
so bad—well, but I mean, she won't hurt

anybody else: she probably did enough good
in her life that the Lord will forgive her:

I am trying to forgive her myself: after all
she left me some room for improvement and

a sense of what to work on....

—A. R. Ammons

own son, now twenty-three, is in this group.

"For a time, our relationship was really nice," Scoditti said. "He used to come every evening to my hut. He was funny and affectionate. But on my last few trips I had the impression he didn't really want to see me. And on this most recent trip he didn't even come to say hello to me."

In the minds of younger people on the island, Tororuwai, "the man who remembers," has become a pillar of traditional Kitawan society. Indeed, the younger people, who were not around when he first arrived, twenty-five years ago, actually believe that Scoditti is a Kitawan, although he dresses and acts like a Westerner. Years ago, his friends on the island used to kid him by saying that he was the son of a Kitawan woman and an Italian sailor who had stopped on the island. The sailor had taken his Kitawan bride back to Rome, they claimed, but then had sent her son back to Kitawa to learn its language and culture. What started as a joke has now become in many younger people's minds a historical fact.

Although the majority of the Kitawans still adhere to their traditions, a sense of malaise appears to be eating away at the culture. "No one has commissioned a new canoe in several years, and no new carvers have been initiated," Scoditti told me. In Kumwageya, the village that Scoditti lived in during his first stay on Kitawa, there have been no dances since 1974. In the other two villages, there has been no dancing in the last few years. "These are things that I am afraid I will never see again," he said.

Life expectancy on Kitawa is lower than in Europe, and over the quarter century that Scoditti has been going there many of his local friends have died. Others are infirm, and have started to talk to him about death—their own and his. What are we going to do, they ask him, if you die when you are not on the island? "They are terrified of the idea of not being on the island when they die," he explained. "It deprives a person of proper burial." Actually, Scoditti intends to have his ashes buried on Kitawa.

In the Kitawan world view, the passage from life to death is gradual and not absolute. "When the soul of the dead person departs, it travels by sea and stops at the first rock and is moved because he can still hear the voices of his loved ones crying," Scoditti said. "At the second rock, he can still see the smoke rising from the yam fields where they are burning weeds. And on the third rock he grabs a little piece of algae and heads toward the island of the dead."

It seems to Scoditti that in the past twenty-five years the traditional Kitawan culture has been suffering a similarly gradual death, becoming fainter, like the voices from the village as the soul departs. "I feel that a phase has ended both for me and for them," he said.

Yet a new phase may be beginning, too. Scoditti may have made an important archeological discovery on his last trip to Kitawa. When farmers were clearing a field that had not recently been under cultivation, they uncovered a series of ancient megaliths arranged in an oval. According to Kitawan myth, the island's original ancestors emerged from the ground, and when they died they buried themselves under a formation of rocks. Scoditti did some digging in the area and found what appear to be human bones, which he took back to Rome for carbon dating. The islands of Melanesia are believed to have been settled between ten thousand and fifteen thousand years ago. If the bones turn out to be as old as that, it could mean that Kitawa has successfully transmitted a genuine historical event from generation to generation over several thousand years, transforming it into myth along the way.

Thus, as the culture he came to study disappears, Scoditti has begun to turn from the anthropological study of Kitawa's present to the archeological study of its remote past. His arrival on the island in 1973 was providential, and yet the very act of preserving the culture in writing also presaged its eventual demise, as if this remote culture began to disappear when we opened it to our own curious gaze. ♦

THE ART WORLD

SARGENT'S PEARLS

The artist who makes the perfect case for wasted talent.

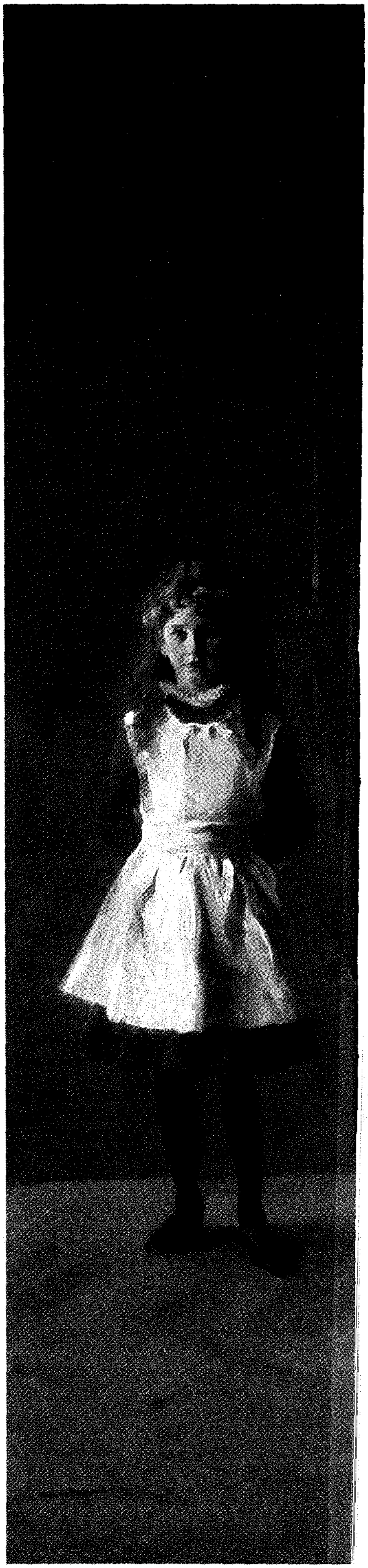
BY ADAM GOPNIK

An image, a little film loop, accompanies the painter's legend. Finishing the portrait of still another society lady, he sighs, loads one side of his brush with a smear of gray paint, dots the other with white. Then his hand, hummingbird quick and machine-gun decisive, races up and down the canvas, flicking the brush back and forth from one side to the other. Within seconds, a string of perfect painted gray pearls hangs from the lady's throat, impeccable down to the smallest highlight.

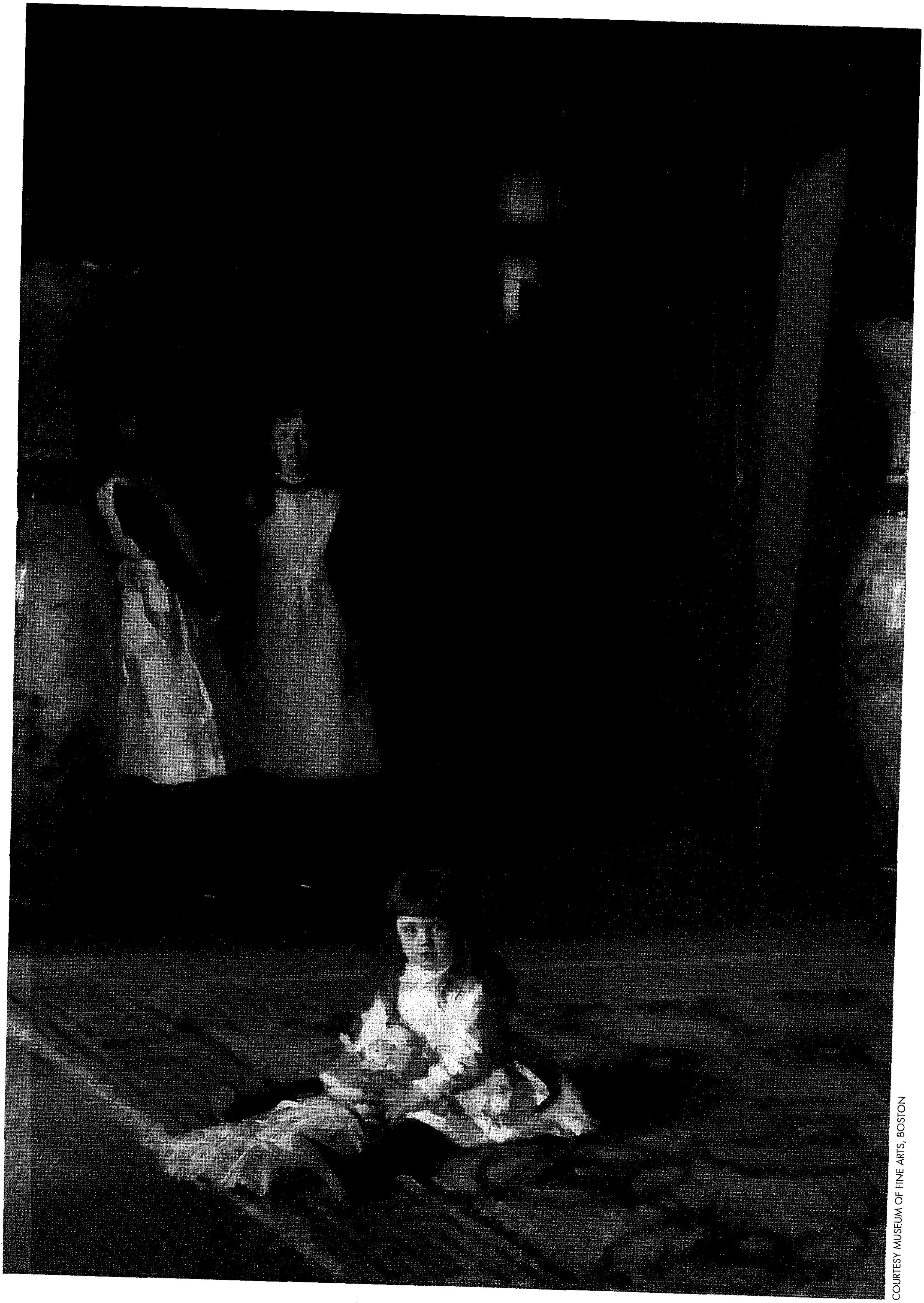
John Singer Sargent is the subject of this vignette, and its point is hard to deny: Sargent was the most naturally gifted American artist who ever picked up a paintbrush. He could do it all: sun-bright watercolors of Venetian canals; shadowed oils of London drawing rooms; Veblen-era millionaires in their walnut-panelled pride; and Burne-Jones children lighting lanterns in the garden. "A knock-down insolence of talent" Henry James called what Sargent had, a little enviously, and a hundred years later Sargent pictures can still knock you down by their insolence. In the years between the end of his bohemian apprenticeship in Paris, in 1886, and the outbreak of the Great War, when he was the biggest star of the London art world, he invented a tight, enchanting, eggshell-smooth faux-naïf style that became the model for every restaurant mural in New York, and, at the same time, a freehanded painterly manner for society portraits (of the laughing-lady, I've-got-these-clothes-but-I'm-not-really-that-kind-of-person type), which, translated into photography, remains the model of society portraiture to this day. (Annie Leibovitz's *Vogue* cover of Hillary is pure Sargent.)

And yet. And yet he never took in the real masters of his time or learned their lessons; and yet he left forward-looking Paris for backward-looking London; and yet he never got modern . . . Shining through the diaphanous middle of that image of him painting the society lady's necklace, after all, is the sadness of painting society ladies and their pearl necklaces. For a generation of early British and American modernist critics, Sargent was the bad guy, Mr. Chocolate Box. If Whistler stands, in the moralizing annals of modern art, as the Loudmouth, the artist who damages his art by talking too much about it, Sargent is the Sellout, the man who had it all and gave it away for money.

A big retrospective of Sargent's work—it hails from the Tate, in London, where it played to packed audiences—opens this month at the National Gallery, in Washington, before heading home to Boston and the Museum of Fine Arts. It includes a hundred and thirteen works and has an excellent, encompassing catalogue by Elaine Kilmurray and Richard Ormond. Looking at Sargent's work entire, you begin to wonder if his life doesn't make as good a case as can be made for wasted talent. The truth is that even wasted talent is everything in art, or nearly so; Sargent had so much talent that it hardly matters what he did with it. Art critics, who will never make a thing of perfect beauty and observation for the world to remember, criticize Sargent for making only ten. Seen whole, he seems as "modern" as any of his contemporaries, though in a singular way: more interestingly variable, outside of time—at moments Jamesian, at moments a failed American Manet, at moments the father of fashion photography. There is even something in the relaxation of his talent—in his readiness



"The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit" (1882), painted for a Boston family living in Paris, is one of the half-dozen great American pictures.



COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

to submit to luxury, his love of money, his distraction by high society, his ability to convey at once great intelligence and a bewildering failure to act on it—that seems, if not exactly admirable, then typical, familiar. In his attitudes as much as in his images, he anticipates the next great American getaway, the American abroad as he would become in the twentieth century, from Hemingway to Orson Welles.

Was he an American at all? He was born in Florence in 1856, grew up there and in Nice and Rome and Dresden, and didn't get home until he was in his twenties. But all this made him appear more American rather than less, made him as American as James or Henry Adams. His father was a Philadelphia doctor from an old New England family, who had written the standard work on bandaging wounds. (It would be used by both sides during the Civil War.) His parents went abroad in the eighteen-fifties for the usual mixture of mid-century reasons: his mother, after the tragic death of an infant child, needed to rest her nerves, and both were hungry for culture. They were the kind of people who fill James's early novels, the Americans who become more American by virtue of trying to fit too tightly into the European scene.

Fairfield Porter once called American artists citizens of the moon. Sargent and his family were citizens of a moon of their own, sharing the odd, lunar isolation of Americans permanently abroad. The children in such expatriate ménages tend to be extremely sober and good—their parents and their peer group, after all, are the same folks—and Sargent was always unrebellious, a good boy, sometimes to his detriment. A natural prodigy in music and drawing, he had another quality common to expatriate children: an extreme self-consciousness that rises from being forced to learn all the different manners dancing around. How do you deal with this guy, what do you show *him,* pale flowers and lemons or pretty children, high life or low? Sargent is, by turns, very French, very British, and very watchful, which is to say, very much an American kid raised abroad.

His talent first became apparent when he went to study, in 1874, with Carolus-Duran, a fashionable academic Impressionist who kept a private school on the Left Bank. A fellow-student wrote wonderingly that Sargent's "drawings are like the Old Masters, and his color is equally fine." The corsetless style of the Impressionists, with everything laid down in fresh paint and no drawing underneath, had already become available. Sargent, though never a radical, learned pure painting from the beginning. He freed his brush and brightened his palette. His early painting of a set of white stone stairs in Capri, half in shadow, has a hushed, abstract purity that anticipates the sculpture in light of the California minimalists, and weaves a shadow language of grays and blacks and slates perfectly into its sunlit white, shading them without leaving any soot. Almost effortlessly, at a first try he wins the gold medal in the great nineteenth-century game of making a white mixed of many colors.

It is disconcerting to discover that many of the Sargents that one knows best from dust-jacket covers and greeting cards, and that have such assurance and authority, are concentrated in that early period—they're almost his juvenilia. Manet is the model, and if Sargent lacks Manet's gift for bleeding a picture down to its unpicturesque essentials, he has a cheerfulness, an almost touristic appetite for sights to see, of his own. He painted Paris. There is the orchestra rehearsing at the Winter Circus, a picture that seems to sweep around the pit and fall down dizzy, like a proto Duchamp. There are the Americans walking in the Luxembourg Gardens, with the dying Arctic French winter sun shining down.

Above all, there is "The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit," of 1882, one of the best American pictures. The Boits were a Boston family with four smallish daughters who were renting an apartment in the eighth arrondissement, and who wanted a portrait that would memorialize their stay. Though Velázquez's "Las Meninas" is said to underlie its square shape, it has none of that great picture's concentration of form. Velázquez's girls are assembled as a group; the Boit girls, although they sit within an implied triangle, feel as if they had been set free inside the picture, going where they choose. Sargent loved young girls sprinkled in shadows, and the wit in the picture lies in the play between the girls' starched-pinafore primness and their cool, confrontational, appraising sexuality. The two older girls whisper in the darkness in the back, the baby stares right out at you, daring you to do something about it all—she's *saucy*—and Marie Louisa, the most breathtaking young girl in art, stands in shadow on the far left, half Dante's Beatrice, half Daisy Miller. "The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit" is a portrait of the weak, figurehead constitutional monarchy—where, after all, is Edward Darley Boit?—that all American families with intelligent children eventually become, the children holding the real authority, while the offstage doges hardly matter.

SARGENT'S career would turn less on novelistic "conversation pieces" of this kind than on standard-issue full-length portraits. In particular, two Parisian portraits he painted in his mid-twenties shaped his subsequent life: "Dr. Pozzi at Home," of 1881, and "Madame X," of 1884, which has been hanging at the Met since 1916. Dr. Pozzi, a French gynecologist-libertine with an El Greco face and a devil-colored bathrobe, makes us glad that Freud lived, if only to empower us to say about this picture that it is possible for something to be both a menstrual and a phallic symbol, a flood of scarlet and an obscene herm.

"Madame X" is more complicated. She is actually a New Orleans socialite named Virginie Avegno. Virginie had been brought by her mother to Paris to make a score, which she did by marrying a rich banker. Sargent wanted badly to paint her. He circled around her and studied her for a year, ending up with the now familiar image of the wasp-waisted, violet-skinned beauty with almond eyes and an upturned chin. When Sargent first showed her, at the Paris Salon of 1884, the strap of her black, cleavage-heavy evening gown was falling off her right shoulder—it actually makes better sense of her pose—and for some reason this drove the French crazy. As Elizabeth Prettejohn explains in her fine study, the picture became the season's *scandale*. People are said to have stood in front of it crying "*Détestable! Ennuyeuse! Curieuse! Monstrueuse!*"

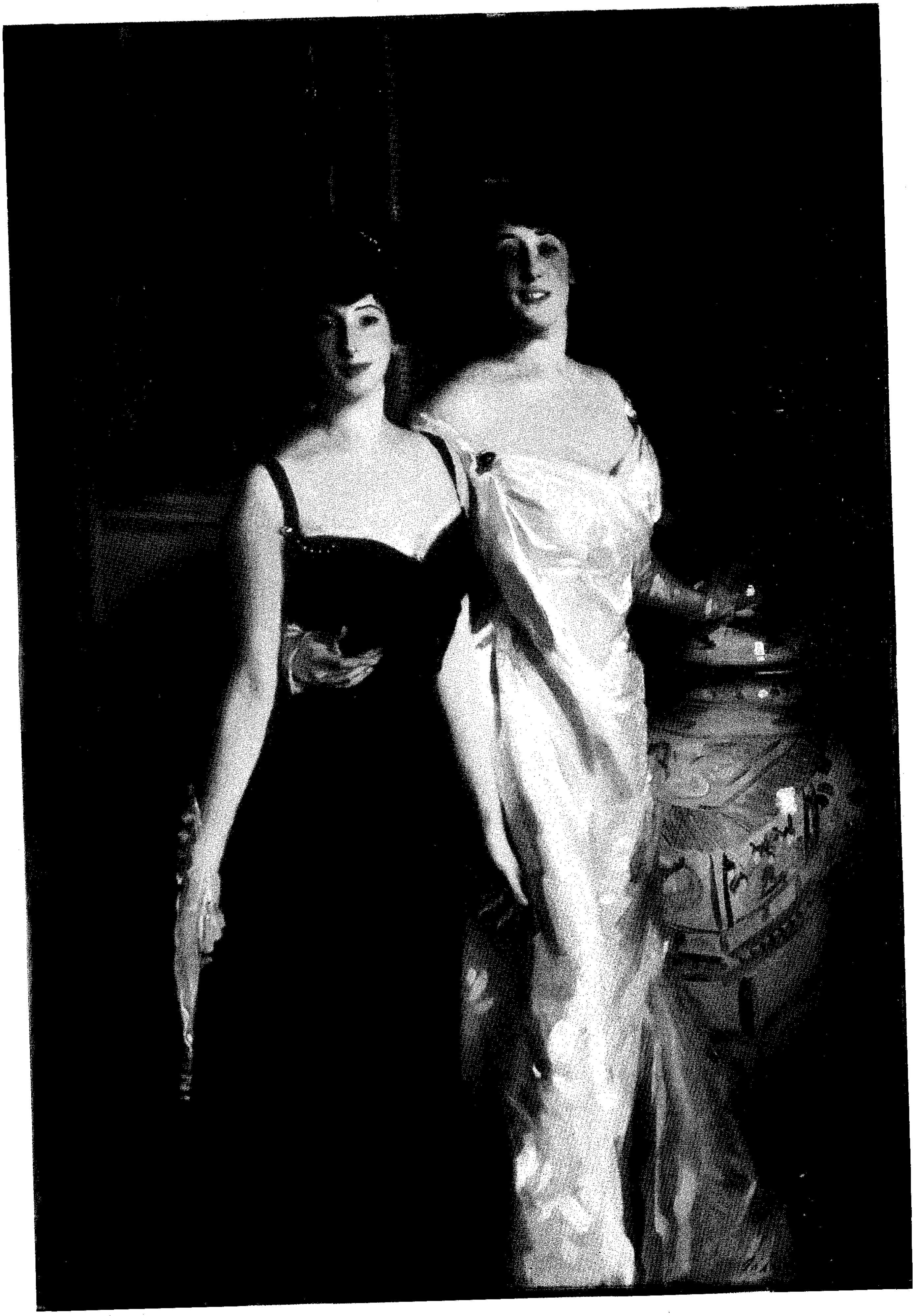
Given that Paris salons were filled with naked dryads and writhing nymphs, a slipped strap seems a funny thing to get worked up about—a little like that word "upstart," which gets Groucho to declare war in "Duck Soup." But maybe that's it: "Madame X" looked presumptuous. "Insolent" is the unexpected word that keeps coming up in the contemporary criticism of Sargent—James used it, and so did Sargent's friend the writer Vernon Lee—and Madame X does look insolent: her strap drops, her cleavage pouts, and she, too, dares you to do something about it. (Sargent did. He repainted the strap back onto her decorous shoulder.) In the Daisy Miller manner, it was an oddly innocent kind of insolence on the part of both painter and subject. Sargent insisted that what turned him on was simply the "chlorate-of-potash-lozenge colour" of her skin.

Kilmurray and Ormond convincingly make the case for Sargent's dependence, starting with "Madame X," on the example of Italian Mannerism, that sixteenth-century hyper-stylish style in which attenuated, long-limbed, small-headed saints and Madonnas writhe in studied, dynamic *contrapposto*. (They even include a reasonably convincing model for "Madame X" in Francesco Salviati's "Bathsheba Goes to King David.") This Mannerist revival was part of the pan-European style of the time, but no one employed it with such vitality as Sargent—made it look so disturbingly animated, inserted it so energetically into pictures of modern people. Their faces and bodies got longer and longer; by the time he was doing the already horse-faced set in England, midget M.P.s look ready to start for the Nets. Through Sargent, Mannerist drawing entered American art and became an underpinning that would help shape it, in ways knowing and unknowing, up through the time of Pollock and de Kooning, who treated it abstractly. The inherent, or, anyway, apparent, ambiguity of Mannerist style got in there willy-nilly, too: twisty, long figures and shapes always tend to look both pained and fashionable. (Vernon Lee wrote, "I fear John is getting rather into the way of painting people too *tense*. They look as if they were in a state of *crispation de nerfs*.") Stretch a person out like taffy, and he's either suffering or modelling. The Mannerist tension implicit in Sargent's elongations—is it agony or allure going on in there?—remained a basic tension in American art throughout the century. It is the same uncertainty that would eventually make us ask if Pollock's long, sinuous loops of paint are dancing or writhing.

THE scandal around "Madame X," by the conventional account, was what drove Sargent from Paris to London. But if you read between the lines of his life it seems as if he had been getting ready to go. He had sought out patrons in London; he had a community of friends there. His bags were

Chloe's Attic
B. Smaller

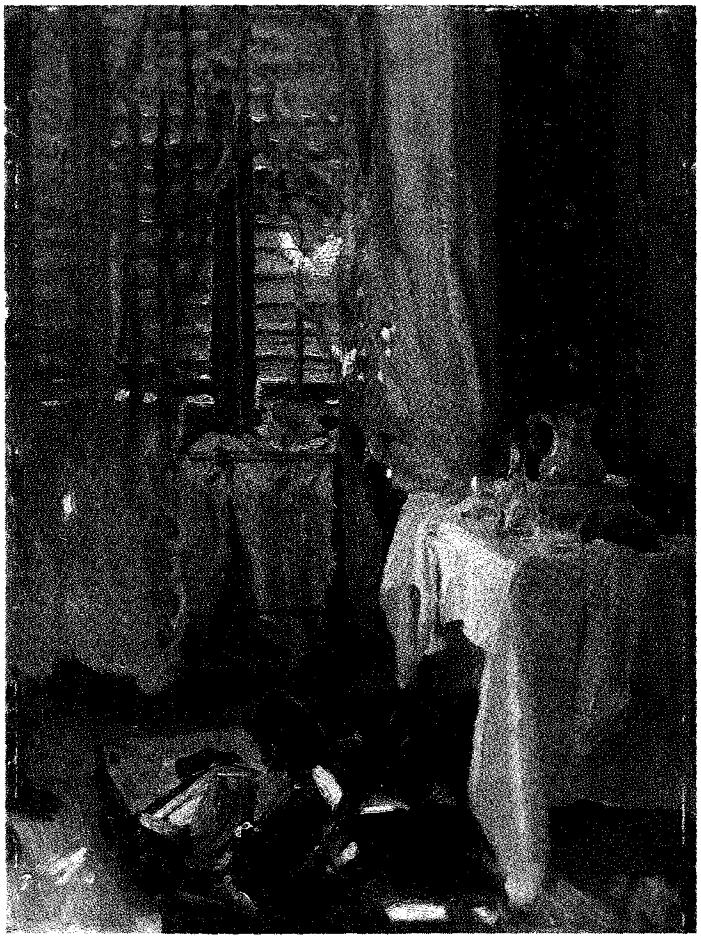
"We can't wear vintage—we are vintage."



packed. There is a strange, predictable rhythm in American departures from Paris. Three of the four great masters of the first American Renaissance—Henry James, Sargent, and Whistler, all Francophile to the bone, all in love with Parisian culture—tried to make a go of living permanently in Paris and couldn't, quite. (The fourth, Henry Adams, loved France, too, but stayed only a while.) Sargent had the longest continuous run, from 1874 to 1886, but London pulled irresistibly, and once he got set up there he never looked back. Paris is a kind of honey pit for Americans of the cosmopolitan-aesthetic disposition. In France, private life still turns on the closed, pre-Romantic seventeenth-century model of *ce pays-ci*—this little country here. The crucial unit of social life in France is the cohort, rather than class, as in England, or the clan, as in Italy. These Parisian cohorts—loosely defined working alliances of people in politics and art and literature, who come together in youth for one purpose or another and then remain linked, if only in mutual hatred, for life—are drawn from a lot of different social classes and clans, and need neutral places to inhabit. This has produced the unique Parisian common civilization of parks and cafés and salons, which give the illusion of democratic entry.

It is only an illusion, though. What looks like a café is a kind of club, and you can no more really walk in than you can walk into White's or Boodle's in St. James's. The cohorts of Paris look open but remain essentially closed. Pressed beyond a polite, yielding point, they clam up as firmly as an Italian family. The Impressionist group, for example, ran from right to left and rich to poor, and remained bound even in antipathy. Sargent, throughout the eighteen-seventies, stood on the friendly edges of the cohort, knocking politely on the door again and again. They looked him over, but they didn't let him in.

What's left to the outsider is the beautiful surface. Sargent's favored places—the Luxembourg Gardens, the Winter Circus—are open, and seem to offer the illusion of assimilation. From Sargent and Whistler to Cioran and Beckett, every expatriate ends up walking around and around the Luxembourg Gardens. Paris is open to anyone, but what is open isn't really Paris. It's a simulacrum Paris, which wraps around the real one, and is there to be looked at. All you can do is paint it.



"The Hotel Room" (1906-07), and "Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer" (1901) opposite.

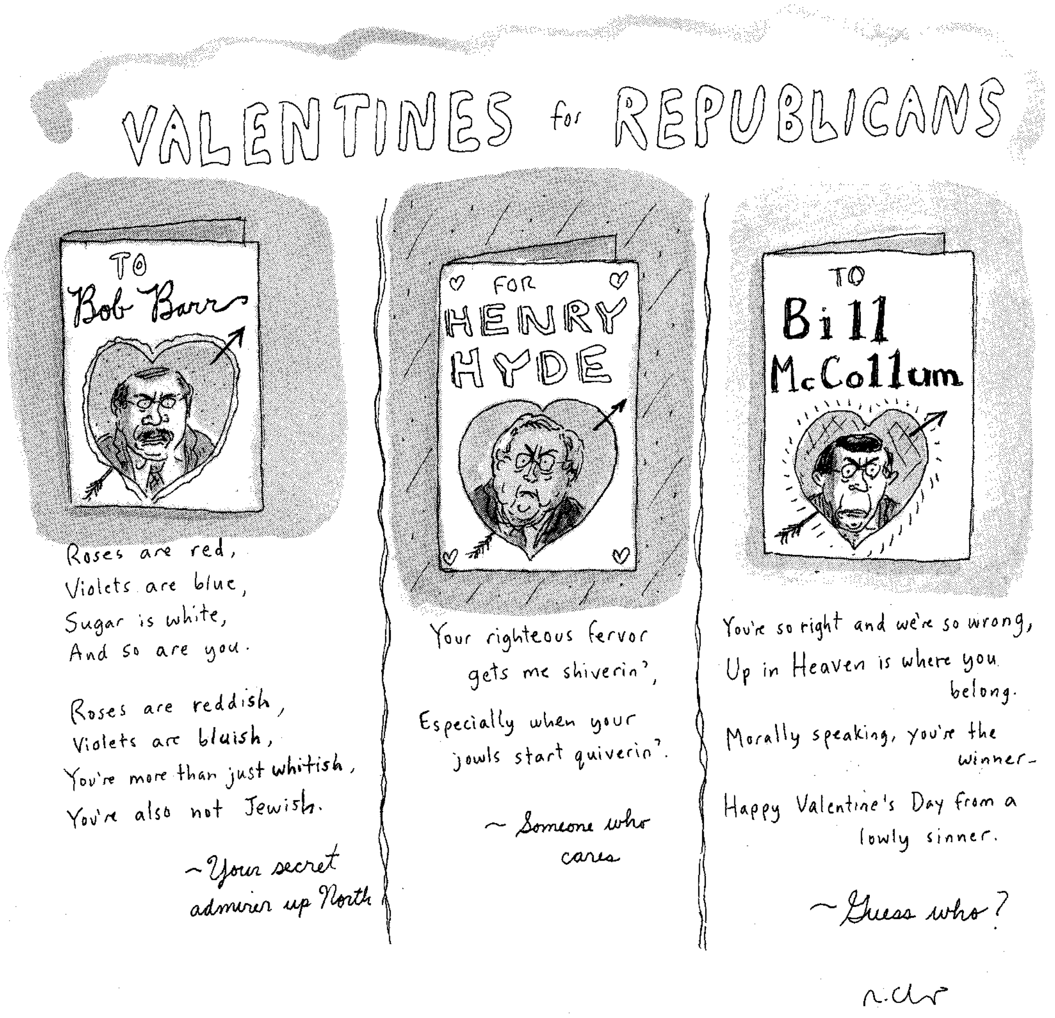
So he moved to London, where nobody feels at home, not even the English. He stopped painting what he saw on walks. The parks and orchestras, the circuses and the whole outdoor, common world vanish from his work, and reappear only on holidays in Venice. In London, the one place to go is inside, if they'll let you. They allowed Sargent in, anyway, and he started painting portraits, and nothing but. Within a couple of years, he was at the top. Max Beerbohm drew two caricatures of Sargent at work around that time: one shows a long queue of willowy beauties lined up outside his studio in Chelsea—it had, almost too neatly, been Whistler's studio before—like shoppers the day after Christmas outside Loehmann's; the other shows Sargent at work, in a mad bravura rush of painterly affect, with a string trio sawing away for inspiration.

Sargent in his glory is a hard man to get a fix on. He had no enemies and many friends, but no sharp-edged profile; he fit no caricatural type. When Beerbohm draws him, we get his paunch and his success, but the artist's character recedes. He was big, portly, and well fed, more like a clubman hiding behind his middle than like an artist leading with his chin. Between his arrival in London and the start of the Great War, he had a Chester A. Arthur girth and a Grover Cleveland mustache. He looks a little like a stuffed shirt. In recent years, his biographers, most interestingly Trevor Fairbrother, have worried over his sexuality, even proposing that he may have been secretly gay. There are certainly drawings that suggest a powerful response to male bodies. But there are just as many that suggest a man ravished by female eyes and throats and fingers. Where Thomas Eakins radiates a clenched lechery, Sargent has a calm, equipoised appetite, the kind you encounter in fashion designers and successful performers, which gets satisfied by whatever's around. There are evocations of him playing his favorite Fauré piano pieces—listeners said that he could have had a concert career—and on the whole his personality seems more like a musician's than like a painter's: secure, detached, hardworking, and with the musician's faith that practice alone can carry you over all the difficult bits of an artistic career.

The new retrospective shows what he gave his sitters: no one else knew how to make rich people look so intelligent. Yet in truth Sargent's own intelligence seems least engaged in the portraits, perhaps out of a professional's distaste for his means of livelihood. Sargent's work also suffered because by the end of the nineteenth century upper-class taste had, outside France, become bad taste. Good taste belonged, as it has ever since, to the realms of the haute-bohemian *internationale*, to which Sargent himself belonged but which he didn't paint. (Whistler had finessed this point either by painting French people or by making his subjects look the way he wanted them to.)

He was saved as an artist by the color white. In every portrait of Sargent's that works, there is a large, beautifully painted patch of white. In each one, the white is achieved a little differently, by some new potent formula of woven secondary colors: the rushing, opalescent, mother-of-pearl-and-aquarium-green skirt of Lady Agnew; the waterfall-spill cobalt-bluish starched white of Alice Vanderbilt Shepard's shirt; the absurd rose-white suit of Lord Dalhousie, as snooty-seeming in its stiff, shoehorn pleats as its wearer is in his expression; above all, the great white skirt of Mrs. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, of 1897, which, all by itself, announces the century's coming American casualness. Sargent's triumph in these "white" portraits is at once high aestheticism and practical fashion advice: he achieved the shimmering complementary white that was an Impressionist dream object, and also made a matter-of-fact note that in modern times rich people look their best in sports clothes.

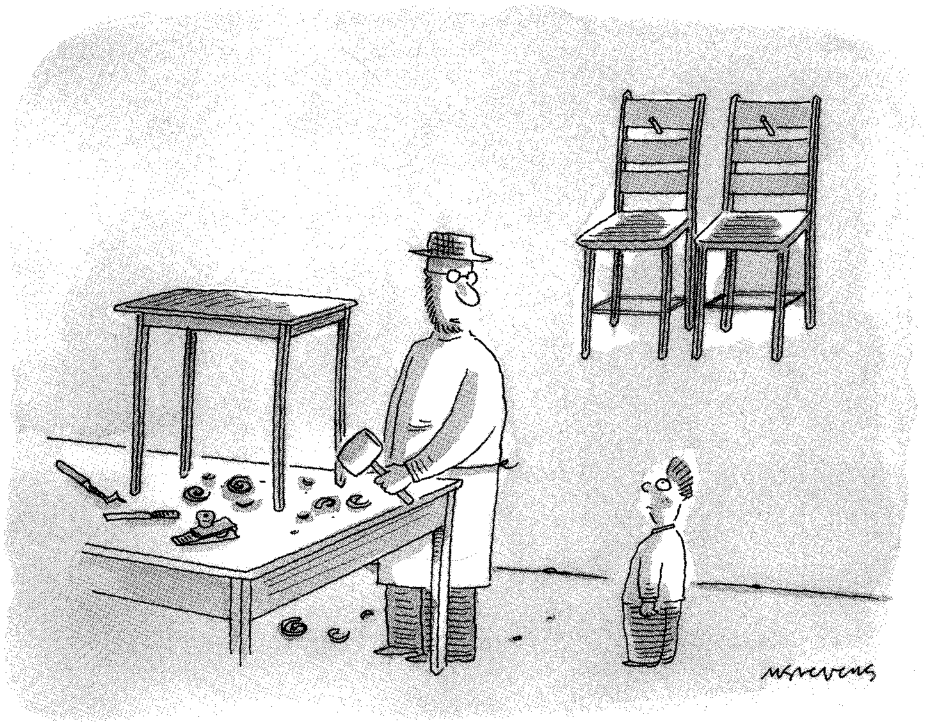
He was saved as a social observer by the patronage of Jews, and, startlingly, they are the people who look most at home in this world, as others noted at the time and as the art historian Kathleen Adler noted recently. In his portrait of Ena and Betty Wertheimer, the two daughters of a family of well-off art dealers, Ena clutches Betty around the waist with a new kind of unembarrassed social excitement. The sisters don't just look "alive," in the conventional portrait-making sense. They look lively. A forced, manic, yet entirely genuine happiness radiates from them. Sargent saw Jews as a racial "type," yet there isn't a trace of anti-Semitism in the pictures. Painting the cold fish of the English upper classes with his hot style, Sargent must often have felt like a discouraged, overworked gigolo: Maybe *that* will arouse you at last. The Wertheimers and their ilk were already aroused. Wertheimer, who was himself painted by Sargent in an almost caricatural pose as a lovable, cigar-smoking stage patriarch, commissioned twelve family portraits from Sargent, and they are an encyclopedia of upwardly mobile insecurity. Betty Wertheimer—flowers in her hair, a part-worried, part-proud, part-pleading expression on her face—is a completely contemporary beauty: she's smart and funny and present. The beautiful Winifred, Duchess of Portland, looks, by comparison, like a bit of chipped porcelain. Picturing arriviste Jews, Sargent at last found an innocent social insolence that matched his own.


VALENTINES for REPUBLICANS
TO
Bob Barr
Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Sugar is white,
And so are you.
Roses are reddish,
Violets are bluish,
You're more than just whitish,
You're also not Jewish.
~Your secret admirer up North
♡ FOR ♡
HENRY HYDE
♡ ♡
Your righteous fervor
gets me shiverin',
Especially when your
jowls start quiverin'.
~Someone who cares
TO
Bill McCollum
You're so right and we're so wrong,
Up in Heaven is where you belong.
Morally speaking, you're the winner-
Happy Valentine's Day from a lowly sinner.
~Guess who?
r.ch

BY the first decade of the twentieth century, Sargent, it seems, was doing portraits for a living and watercolors for himself. After he moved to London, he had begun to use the full possibilities of a "freed" palette. He married that French freedom to a more decorative kind of English aestheticism, producing one of the most ravishing pictures in the world: "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"—the title comes from a popular song. The perfect but unprettified young girls in their white smocks, the uncanny "capture" of the upturned paper-lantern glow—it is in its way a profound picture, saved from falseness (it doesn't try to save itself from sentimentality) by the simple grace of its conception, just "a charming thing I saw the other evening, " as Sargent wrote, but given the sober importance of a Botticelli mythology. It became the type, for good or ill, of most calendar art, and of mural painting such as one sees in the Café des Artistes. (S. J. Perelman once wrote a Hollywood-spoof life of Sargent, in which he triumphed, happily enough, by painting the murals in the King Cole bar at the St. Regis.)

The spirit of that picture was allowed to radiate from his watercolors into his uncommissioned pictures of the time, and they are all a joy. The most beautiful, "Two Girls in White Dresses," shows two American girls lying on their shawls, overcome by sheer petulant exhaustion, somewhere on an Alpine hillside. One girl looks up, her lovely face set deep inside a bonnet; the other reads a letter. You can still feel Sargent's excitement, his laughter at the moment: Oh, stay like that, both of you, don't move. The girl stretched out before us, beneath us, has her perfect face caught dramatically, a delicious little scallop in a big striated shell. It is a sexy, almost a lascivious, picture: one feels the curves of her offered body even under the vast white dress, the scarf fixed at her waist, covering her middle, as sexy as a sarong—so dressed up she's nearly naked. "Two Girls in White Dresses" is the title that Fitzgerald wanted for every one of his stories. In fact, the two girls with their billowing dresses and spoiled charm so strongly recall Daisy and Jordan at the moment of their introduction in "Gatsby" that one wonders if Fitzgerald might not have seen the picture someplace.

IN 1907, Sargent gave up portrait painting completely, rejecting even commissions, and looked for something new to do. The truth is that deathbed repentances never work in art. Artists who find a great late style—Matisse, de Kooning—do it by simplifying what they already do, not by doing something else. The glimpse of one possible way forward for Sargent lies in a haunting picture, "The Hotel Room," of 1906-07: a study in green late-afternoon light slipping past the shutters into the hotel room of a half-packed permanent itinerant. One can imagine a more subdued, interior Sargent working for years on such hotel rooms, the way Manet withdrew to his cut flowers. But Sargent wanted to step up, not back. He accepted a commission to do a series of Biblical murals, of all mad things, for the Boston Public Library, on the history of religion. No modern artist has done well with a set religious scheme. But Sargent's murals are ridiculous: stage sets for a D. W. Griffith movie, with, at best, a campy intensity. They are a kind of catalogue of "Semitic" clichés.



"No, lad, we aren't movers. We're just Shakers."

• •

The Boston murals marked the end of his romance with the Jews; the allegorical figure of the Synagogue was shown blindfolded and fallen, and Boston Jews objected. Sargent probably didn't mean it that way—after all, that was how the synagogue was always shown in European religious art—but when the storm broke he wrote to a friend that "a prominent member of the Jewish colony is coming" to protest. With the outbreak of the Great War, Sargent tried his hand at solemn battlefield pictures—gassed men groping in line—and, though deeply felt, as art they are stillborn.

The tempting thing to say is that, with the war, his subject and his period had passed. When he died, in 1925, he seemed to belong to another time. But the truth is that his subject, the American at ease abroad, was only just beginning: he was the prophet of the unrooted Americans of the twenties. The two small, potent masterpieces that bracket his career, the white stairs and the green hotel, still register as essential symbolic images, expressing both the lure of European existence and the place where the dream lands you. Sargent offers not the old world of Catholic civilization and cathedrals but an old world of leisure, wine, spaciousness, sunshine, cafés—no one else's pictures show the exhalation of breath that an American can feel in Europe, the possibility of leisure. If we could just walk up the white, sunlit stairs to the terrace and a life of leisure, order, and serenity. But there is no such life, and one ends up in the green hotel room in late afternoon, which has a glamour and a sadness of its own, but finally isn't a life. This is a familiar American arc from hope to disillusion, and you see it first in Sargent.

He could have done more, of course, but would we love him more if he had? An artist's grasp sometimes should exceed his reach, or what's America for? Looking at his pictures, we hear his voice, over and over, making the one firm, impossible demand the worldly artist makes on the world: Stay like that. Perfect! Don't move. ♦

FICTION

HE'S AT THE OFFICE

When should a father come home?

BY ALLAN GURGANUS

TILL the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, most American men wore hats to work. What happened? Did our guys—suddenly scouting overhead for worse Sunday raids—come to fear their hatbrims' interference? My unsuspecting father wore his till yesterday. He owned three. A gray, a brown, and a summer straw one, whose maroon-striped rayon band could only have been woven in America in the nineteen-forties.

Last month, I lured him from his self-imposed office hours for a walk around our block. My father insisted on bringing his briefcase. "You never know," he said. We soon passed a huge young hipster, creaking in black leather. The kid's pierced face flashed more silver than most bait shops sell. His jeans, half down, exposed hatracks of white hipbone; the haircut arched high over jug ears. He was scouting Father's shoes. Long before fashion joined him, Dad favored an under-evolved antique form of orthopedic Doc Martens. These impressed a punk now scanning the Sherman tank of a cowhide briefcase with chromium corner braces. The camel-hair overcoat was cut to resemble some boxy-backed 1947 Packard. And, of course, up top sat "the gray."

Pointing to it, the boy smiled. "Way bad look on you, guy."

My father, seeking interpretation, stared at me. I simply shook my head no. I could not explain Dad to himself in terms of tidal fashion trends. All I said was "I think he likes you."

Dad's face folded. "Uh-oh."

By the end, my father, the fifty-two-year veteran of Integrity Office Supplier, Unlimited, had become quite cool again, way.

WE couldn't vacation for more than three full days. He'd veer our Plymouth toward some way-station pay phone. We soon laughed as Dad, in the glass booth, commenced to wave his arms, shake his head, shift his weight from foot to foot. We knew Miss Green must be telling him of botched orders, delivery mistakes. We were nearly to Gettysburg. I'd been studying battle maps. Now I knew we'd never make it.

My father bounded back to the car and smiled in. "Terrible mixup with the Wilmington school system's carbon paper for next year. Major goof, but typical. Guy's got to do it all himself. Young Green didn't insist I come back, but she sure hinted."

We U-turned southward, and my father briefly became the most charming man on earth. He now seemed to be selling something we needed, whatever we needed. Travelling north into a holiday—the very curse of leisure—he had kept as silent as some fellow with toothaches. Now he was our tour guide, interviewing us, telling and retelling his joke. Passing a cemetery, he said (over his family's dry carbon-paper unison), "I hear they're dying to get in there!" "Look on the bright side," I told myself: "we'll arrive home and escape him as he runs—literally runs—to the office."

Dad was, like me, an early riser. Six days a week, Mom sealed his single-sandwich lunch into its Tupperware jacket; this fit accidentally yet exactly within the lid compartment of his durable briefcase. He would then pull on his overcoat—bulky, war-efficient, strong-seamed, four buttons big as silver dollars and carved from actual shell. He'd place the cake-sized hat in place, nod in our general direction, and set off hurrying. Dad faced each day as one more worthy enemy. If he had been Dwight Eisenhower saving the Western world, or Jonas Salk freeing kids our age from crutches, O.K. But yellow Eagle pencils? Utility paperweights in park-bench green?

Once a year, Mom told my brother and me how much the war had darkened her young husband; he'd enlisted with three other guys from Falls; he alone came back alive with all his limbs. "Before that," she smiled, "your father was funnier, funny. And smarter. Great dancer. You can't blame mustard gas, not this time. It's more what Dick saw. He came home and he was all business. Before that, he'd been mischievous and talkative and strange. He was always playing around with words. Very entertaining. Eyelashes out to here. For years, I figured that in time he'd come back to being whole. But since June of '45 it's been All Work and No Play Makes Jack."

Mom remembered their fourth anniversary. "I hired an overnight sitter for you two. We drove to an inn near Asheville. It had the state's best restaurant, candlelight, a real string quartet. I'd made myself a green velvet dress. I was twenty-eight and never in my whole life have I ever looked better. You just know it. Dick recognized some man who'd bought two adding machines. Dick invited him to join us. Then I saw how much his work was going to have to mean to him. Don't be too hard on him, please. He feeds us, he puts aside real savings for you boys' college. Dick pays our taxes. Dick has no secrets. He's not hurting anyone." Brother and I gave each other a look Mom recognized and understood but refused to return.

The office seemed to tap some part of him that was either off limits to us or simply did not otherwise exist. My brother and I griped that he'd never attended our Little League games (not that we ever made the starting lineup). He missed our father-son Cub Scout banquet; it conflicted with a major envelope convention in Newport News. Mother neutrally said he loved us as much as he could. She was a funny, energetic person—all that wasted good will. And even as kids, we knew not to blame her.

Ignored, Mom created a small sewing room. Economizing needlessly, she stayed busy stitching all our school clothes, cowboy motifs galore. For a while, each shirtpocket bristled with Mom-designed embroidered cacti. But Simplicity patterns were never going to engage a mind as complex as hers. Soon Mom was spending most mornings playing vicious duplicate bridge. Our toothbrush glasses briefly broke out in rashes of red hearts, black clubs. Mom's new pals were society ladies respectful of her brainy speed, her impenitent wit; she never bothered introducing them to her husband. She laughed more now. She started wearing rouge.

We lived a short walk from both our school and his wholesale office. Dad sometimes left the Plymouth parked all night outside the workplace, his desk lamp the last one burning on the whole third floor. Integrity's president, passing headquarters late, always fell for it. "Dick, what do you do up there all night, son?" My father's shrug became his finest boast. The raises kept pace; Integrity Office Supplier was still considered quite a comer. And R. Richard

Markham, Sr.—handsome as a collar ad, a hat ad, forever at the office—was the heir apparent.

DAD'S was Integrity's flagship office: "Maker of World's Highest Quality Clerical Supplies." No other schoolboys had sturdier pastel subject dividers, more clip-in see-through three-ring pen caddies. The night before school started, Dad would be up late at our kitchen table, swilling coffee, "getting you boys set." Zippered leather cases, English slide rules, folders more suitable for treaties than for book reports ("'Skipper, A Dog of the Pyrenees,' by Marjorie Hopgood Purling"). Our notebooks soon proved too heavy to carry far; we secretly stripped them, swapping gear for lunchbox treats more exotic than Mom's hard-boiled eggs and Sun-Maid raisin packs.

Twenty years ago, Dad's Integrity got bought out by a German firm. The business's vitality proved somewhat hobbled by computers' onslaught. "A fad," my father called computers in 1976. "Let others retool. We'll stand firm with our yellow legals, erasers, Parker ink, fountain pens. Don't worry, our regulars'll come back. True vision always lets you act kind in the end, boys. Remember."

Yeah, right.

My father postponed his retirement. Mom encouraged that and felt relieved; she could not imagine him at home all day. As Integrity's market share dwindled, Dad spent more time at the office, as if to compensate with his own body for the course of modern life.

HIS secretary, the admired Miss Green, had once been what Pop still called "something of a bombshell." (He stuck with a Second World War terminology that had, like the hat, served him too well to ever leave behind.)

Still favoring shoulder pads, dressed in unyielding woollen Joan Crawford solids, Green wore an auburn pageboy that looked burned by decades of ungrateful dyes. She kicked off her shoes beneath her desk, revealing feet that told the tale of high heels' worthless weekday brutality. She'd quit college to tend an ailing mother, who proved demanding, then immortal. Brother and I teased Mom: poor Green appeared to worship her longtime boss, a guy whose face was as smooth and wedged and classic as his hat. Into Dick Markham's blunted constancy she read actual "moods."

He still viewed Green, now past sixty, as a promising virginal girl. In their small adjoining offices, these two thrived within a fond impersonality that permeated the ads of the period.

Integrity's flagship headquarters remained enamelled a flavorless mint green, unaltered for five decades. The dark Mission coatrack was made by Limbert—quite a good piece. One ashtray—upright, floor model, brushed chromium—proved the size and shape of some landlocked torpedo. Moored to walls, dented metal desks were gray as battleships. A series of forest-green filing cabinets seemed banished, patient as a family of trolls, to one shaming little closet all their own. Dad's office might've been decorated by a firm called Edward Hopper & Sam Spade, Unlimited.

For more than half a century, he walked in each day at seven-oh-nine sharp, as Miss Green forever said, "Morning, Mr. Markham. I left your appointments written on your desk pad, can I get you your coffee? Is now good, sir?" And Dad said, "Yes, why, thanks, Miss Green, how's your mother, don't mind if I do."

FOUR years ago, I received a panicked phone call: "You the junior to a guy about eighty, guy in a hat?"

"Probably." I was working at home. I pressed my computer's "Save" function. This, I sensed, might take a while. "Save."

"Exit? No? Yes?"

"Yes."

"Mister, your dad thinks we're camped out in his office and he's been banging against our door. He's convinced we've evicted his files and what he calls his Green. 'What have you done with young Green?' Get down here A.S.A.P. Get him out of our hair or it's 911 in three minutes, swear to God."

From my car, I phoned home. Mom must have been off somewhere playing bridge with the mayor's blond wife and his blond ex-wife; they'd sensibly become excellent friends. The best women are the best people on earth; and the worst men the very worst. Mother, overlooked by Dad for years, had continued finding what she called "certain outlets."

When I arrived, Dad was still heaving himself against an office door, deadbolt-locked from within. Since its upper panel was frosted glass, I could make out the colors of the clothes of three or four people pressing from their side. They'd used masking tape to crosshatch the glass, as if bracing for a hurricane. The old man held his briefcase, wore his gray hat, the tan boxy coat.

"Dad?" He stopped with a mechanical cartoon verve, jumped my way, and smiled so hard it warmed my heart and scared me witless. My father had never acted so glad to see me—not when I graduated summa cum laude, not at my wedding, not after the birth of my son—and I felt joy in the presence of such joy from him.

"Reinforcements. Good man. We've got quite a hostage situation here. Let's put our shoulders to it, shall we?"

"Dad?" I grabbed the padded shoulders of his overcoat. These crumpled to reveal a man far sketchier hiding in there somewhere—a guy only twenty years from a hundred, after all.

"Dad? Dad. We have a good-news, bad-news setup here today. It's this. You found the right building, Dad. Wrong floor."

I led him back to the clattering, oil-smelling elevator. I thought to return, tap on the barricaded door, explain. But, in time, hey, they'd peek, they'd figure out the coast was clear. That they hadn't recognized him, after his fifty-two years of long days in this very building, said something. New people, everywhere.

I saw at once that Miss Green had been crying. Her face was caked with so much powder it looked like calamine. "Little mixup," I said.

"Mr. Markham? We got three calls about those gum erasers," she said, faking a frontal normality. "I think they're putting sawdust in them these days, sir. They leave skid marks, apparently. I put the information on your desk. With your day's appointments. Like your coffee? Like it now? Sir?"

I hung his hat on the hat tree; I slid his coat onto its one wooden Deco hanger that could, at any flea market today, bring thirty-five dollars easy, two tones of wood, inlaid.

I wanted to have a heart-to-heart. I was so disoriented as to feel half sane myself. But I overheard Father already returning his calls. He ignored me, and that seemed, within this radically altered gravitational field, a good sign. I sneaked back to Miss Green's desk and admitted, "I'll need to call his doctor. I want him seen today, Miss Green. He was up on four, trying to get into that new headhunting service. He told them his name. Mom was out. So they, clever, looked him up in the book and found his junior and phoned me to come help."

She sat forward, strenuously feigning surprise. She looked rigid, chained to this metal desk by both gnarled feet. "How long?" I somehow knew to ask.

Green appeared ecstatic, then relieved, then, suddenly, happily weeping, tears pouring down—small tears, lopsided, mascaraed grit. She blinked up at me with a spaniel's gratitude. Suddenly, if slowly, I began to understand. In mere seconds, she had caved about Dad's years-long caving-in. It was my turn now.

Miss Green now whispered certain of his mistakes. There were forgotten parking tickets by the dozen. There was his attempt to purchase a lake house on land already flooded for a dam. Quietly, she admitted years of covering.

From her purse, she lifted a page covered in Dad's stern Germanic cursive, blue ink fighting to stay isometrically between red lines.

"I found this one last week." Green's voice seemed steadied by the joy of having told. "I fear this is about the worst, to date, we've been."

If they say "Hot enough for you?," it means recent weather. "Yes indeed" still a good comeback. Order forms pink. Requisition yellow. Miss green's birthday June 12. She work with you fifty-one years. Is still unmarried. Mother now dead, since '76, so stop asking about Mother, health of. Home address, 712 Marigold Street: Left at Oak, can always walk there. After last week, never go near car again. Unfair to others. Take second left at biggest tree. Your new Butcher's name is: Al. Wife: Betty. Sons: Matthew and Dick Junior. Grandson Richie (your name with a III added on it). List of credit cards, licnse etc. below in case you lose walet agn, you big dope. Put copies somewhere safe, 3 places, write down, hide many. You are 80, yes, eighty.

And yet, as we now eavesdropped, Dick Markham dealt with a complaining customer. He sounded practiced, jokey, conversant, exact.

"Dad, you have an unexpected doctor's appointment." I handed Dad his hat. I'd phoned our family physician from Miss Green's extension.

For once, they were ready for us. The nurses kept calling him by name, smiling, overinsistent, as if hinting at answers for a kid about to take his make-or-break college exam. I could see they'd always liked him. In a town this small, they'd maybe heard about his trouble earlier today.

As Dad got ushered in for tests, he glowered accusations back at me as if I had just dragged him to a Nazi medical experiment. He finally reëmerged, scarily pale, pressing a bit of gauze into the crook of his bare arm, its long veins the exact blue of Parker's washable ink. They directed him toward the lobby bathroom. They gave him a cup for his urine specimen. He held it before him with two hands like some Magi's treasure.

His hat, briefcase, and overcoat remained behind, resting on an orange plastic chair all their own. Toward these I could display a permissible tenderness. I lightly set my hand on each item. Call it superstition. I now lifted the hat and sniffed it. It smelled like Dad. It smelled like rope. Physical intimacy has never been a possibility. My brother and I, half drunk, once tried to picture the improbable, the sexual conjunction of our parents. Brother said, "Well, he probably pretends he's at the office, unsealing her like a good manila envelope that requires a rubber stamp—legible, yes, keep it legible, *legible*, now speed-mail!"

I had flipped through four stale magazines before I saw the nurses peeking from their crudely cut window. "He has been quite a while, Mr. Markham. Going on thirty minutes."

"Shall I?" I rose and knocked. No answer. "Would you come stand behind me?" Cowardly, I signalled to an older nurse.

The door proved unlocked. I opened it. I saw one old man aimed the other way and trembling with hesitation. Before him, a white toilet, a white sink,

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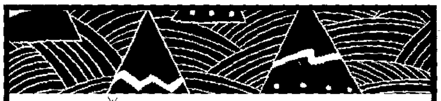

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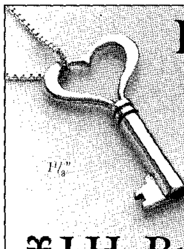

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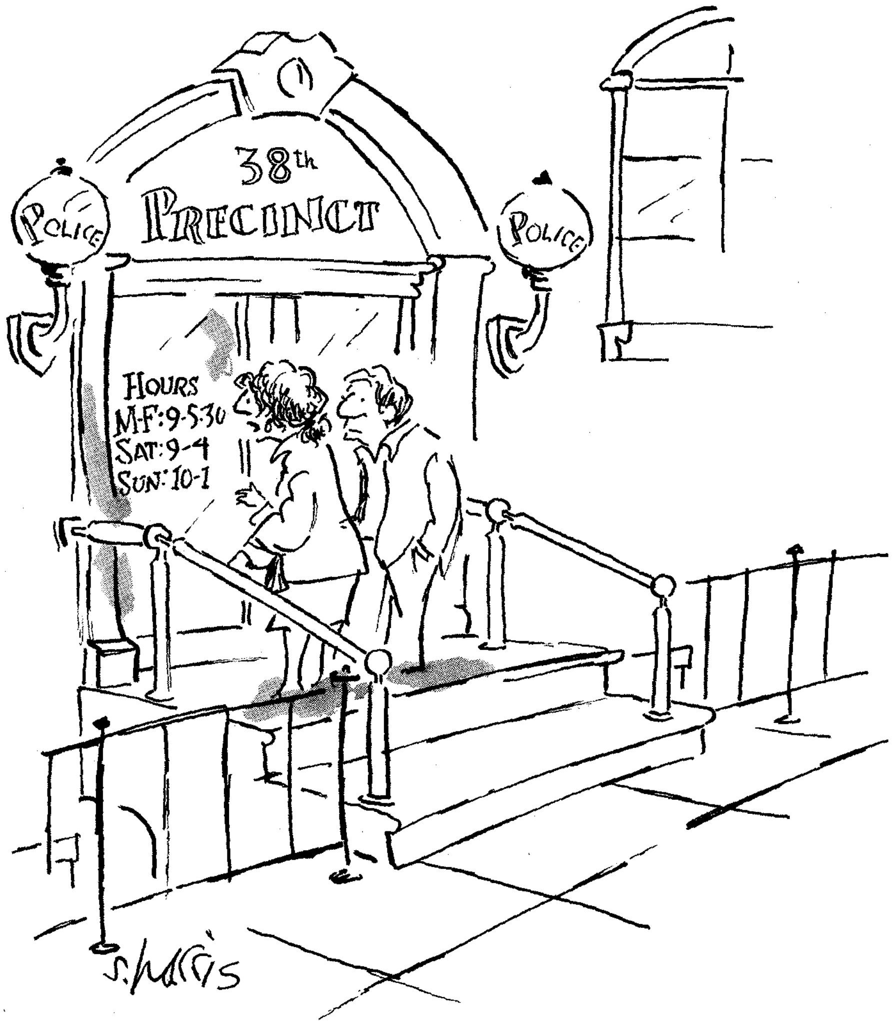


"Looks like crime is down."

and a white enamel trash can, the three aligned—each its own insistent invitation. In one hand, the old man held an empty specimen cup. In the other hand, his dick.

Turning my way, grateful, unashamed to be caught sobbing, he cried, "Which one, son? Fill which one?"

FORCIBLY retired, my father lived at home in his pajamas. Mom made him wear the slippers and robe to help with his morale. "Think 'Thin Man.' Think William Powell." But the poor guy literally hung his head with shame. That phrase took on new meaning now that his routine and dignity proved so reduced. Dad's mopey presence clogged every outlet she'd perfected to avoid him. The two of them were driving each other crazy.

Lacking the cash for live-in help, she was forced to cut way back on her bridge game and female company. She lost ten pounds—it showed in her neck and face—and then she gave up rouge. You could see Mom missed her fancy friends. I soon pitied her nearly as much as I pitied him—no, more. At least he allowed himself to be distracted. She couldn't forget.

Mom kept urging him to get dressed. She said they needed to go to the zoo. She had to get out and "do" something. One morning, she was trying to force Dad into his dress pants when he struck her. She fell right over the back of an armchair. The whole left side of her head stayed a rubber-stamp pad's blue-black for one whole week. Odd, this made it easier for both of them to stay home. Now two people hung their heads in shame.

At a window overlooking the busy street, Dad would stand staring out, one way. On the window glass, his forehead left a persistent oval of human oil. His pajama knees pressed against the radiator. He silently second-guessed parallel parkers. He studied westerly-moving traffic. Sometimes he'd stand guard there for six uninterrupted hours. Did he await some detained patriotic parade? I pictured poor Green on a passing float—hoisting his coffee mug and the black phone receiver, waving him back down to street level, reality, use.

One December morning, Mom—library book in lap, trying to reinterest herself in Daphne du Maurier, in anything—smelled scorching. Like Campbell's mushroom soup left far too long on simmer. Twice she checked their stove and toaster-oven. Finally, around his nap time, she pulled Dad away from the radiator: his shins had cooked. "Didn't it hurt you, Dick? Darling, didn't you ever feel anything?"

Next morning at six-thirty, I got her call. Mom's husky tone sounded too jolly for the hour. She described bandaging both legs. "As you kids say, I don't think this is working for us. This might be beyond me. Integrity's fleabag insurance won't provide him with that good a home. We have just enough to go on living here as usual. Now, I'll maybe shock you and you might find me weak or, worse, disloyal. But would you consider someday checking out some nice retreats or facilities in driving distance? Even if it uses up the savings. Your father is the love of my life—one per customer. I just hate to get any more afraid of him!"

I said I'd phone all good local places, adding, giddy, "I hear they're dying to get in there."

This drew a silence as cold as his. "Your dad's been home from the office—what, seven months? Most men lean toward their leisure years, but who ever hated leisure more than Dick? When I think of everything he gave Integrity and how little he's getting back . . . I'm not strong enough to *keep* him, but I can't bear to *put* him anywhere. Still, at this rate, all I'll want for Christmas is a nice white padded cell for two."

I wished my mother belonged to our generation, where the women work. She could've done anything. And now to be saddled with a man who'd known nothing but enslavement to one so-so office. The workaholic, tabled. He still refused to dress; she focussed on the sight of his pajamas. My folks now argued with the energy of newlyweds; then she felt ashamed of herself and he forgot to do whatever he'd just promised.

On Christmas Eve, she was determined to put up a tree for him. But Dad, somehow frightened by the ladder and all the unfamiliar boxes everywhere, got her into such a lethal headlock she had to scream for help. Now the neighbors were involved. People I barely knew interrupted my work hours, saying, "Something's got to be done. It took three of us to pull him off of her. He's still strong as a horse. It's getting dangerous over there. He could escape."

Sometimes, at two in the morning, she'd find him standing in their closet, wearing his p.j.s and the season's correct hat. He'd be looking at his business suits. The right hand would be filing, "walking," back and forth across creased pant legs, as if seeking the . . . exact . . . right . . . pair . . . for . . . the office . . . today.

I TRIED to keep Miss Green informed. She'd sold her duplex and moved into our town's most stylish old-age home. When she swept downstairs to greet me, I didn't recognize her. "God, you look fifteen years younger." I checked her smile for hints of a possible lift.

She just laughed, giving her torso one mild shimmy. "Look, Ma. No shoulder pads."

Her forties hairdo, with its banked, rolled edges, had softened into pretty little curls around her face. She'd let its color go her natural silvery blond. Green gave me a slow look. If I didn't know her better, I'd have sworn she was flirting.

She appeared shorter in flats. I now understood: her toes had been so mangled by wearing those forties quonset-huts of high heels, ones she'd probably owned since age eighteen. Her feet had grown, but she'd stayed true to the old shoes, part of some illusion she felt my dad required.

Others in the lobby perked up at her fond greeting; I saw she'd already become the belle of this place. She let me admire her updated charms.

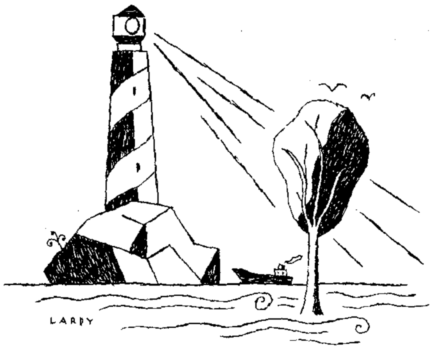
"No," she smiled simply, "it's that I tried to keep it all somewhat familiar for him. How I looked and all. We got to where Mr. Markham found any change a kind of danger, so . . . I mean, it wasn't as if a dozen other suitors were beating down my door. What with Mother being moody and sick that long. And so, day to day, well . . ." She shrugged.

NOW, in my life I've had very few inspired ideas. Much of me, like Pop, is helplessly a company man. So forgive my boasting of this.

Leaving Miss Green's, I stopped by a huge Salvation Army store. It was a good one. Over the years, I've found a few fine Federal side chairs here and many a great tweed jacket. Browsing through the used-furniture room, I wandered beneath a cardboard placard hand-lettered "The World of Early American." Ladder-back deacon's chairs and plaid upholstered things rested knee to knee, like sad and separate families.

I chanced to notice a homeless man, asleep, a toothless white fellow. His overcoat looked filthy. His belongings were bunched around him in six rubber-banded shoeboxes. His feet, in paint-stained shoes, rested on an ordinary school administrator's putty-colored desk. "The Wonderful World of Work" hung over hand-me-down waiting rooms still waiting. Business furniture sat parlored—forlorn as any gray-green Irish wake. There was something about the sight of this old guy's midday snoring in so safe a fluorescent make-work cubicle.

Mom now used her sewing room only for those few overnight third cousins willing to endure its lumpy foldout couch. The room'd become a catchall, cold storage, since about 1970. We waited for Dad's longest nap of the day. Then, in a crazed burst of energy, we cleared her lair, purging it of boxes, photo albums, four unused exercise machines. I paint-rolled its walls in record time, the ugliest latex junior-high-school green that Sherwin-Williams sells (there's still quite a range). The Salvation Army delivers: within two days, I had arranged this new-used-junk to resemble Integrity's workspace, familiarly anonymous. A gray desk nuzzled one wall—the window wasted behind. Three green file cabinets made a glum herd. One swivel wooden chair rode squeaky casters. The hatrack antlered upright over a dented tin wastebasket. The ashtray looked big enough to serve an entire cancer ward. Wire shelves predicted a neutral "in," a far more optimistic "out." I stuffed desk drawers with Parker ink, cheap fountain pens, yellow legal pads, four dozen paper clips. I'd bought a big black rotary phone, and Mom got him his own line.



Against her wishes, I'd saved most of Dad's old account ledgers. Yellowed already, they could've come from a barrister's desk in a Dickens novel. I scattered "1959-62." In one corner I piled all Dad's boxed records, back taxes, old Christmas cards from customers. The man saved everything.

The evening before we planned introducing him to his new quarters, I disarranged the place a bit. I tossed a dozen pages on the floor near his chair. I left the desk lamp lit all night. It gave this small room a strange hot smell, overworked. The lamp was made of nubbly brown cast metal (recast war surplus?), its red button indicating "on." Black meant "off."

That morning I was there to help him dress. Mom made us a hearty oatmeal breakfast, packed his lunch, and snapped the Tupperware insert into his briefcase.

"And where am *I* going?" he asked us in a dead voice.

"To the office," I said. "Where else do you go this time of day?"

He appeared sour, puffy, skeptical. Soon as I could, I glanced at Mom. This was not going to be as easy as we'd hoped.

I got Dad's coat and hat. He looked gray and dubious. He would never believe in this new space if I simply squired him down the hall to it. So, after handing him his briefcase, I led Dad back along our corridor and out onto the street.

Some of the old-timers, recognizing him, called, "Looking good, Mr. Markham," or "Cold enough for you?" Arm in arm, we nodded past them.

My grammar school had been one block from his office. Forty years back, we'd set out on foot like this together. The nearer Dad drew to Integrity, the livelier he became; the closer I got to school, the more withdrawn I acted. But today I kept up a mindless over-plentiful patter. My tone neither cheered nor deflected him. One block before his office building, I swerved back down an alley toward the house. As we approached, I saw that Mom had been imaginative enough to leave our front door wide open. She'd removed a bird print that had hung in our foyer hall unloved forever. A mere shape, it still always marked this as our hall, our home.

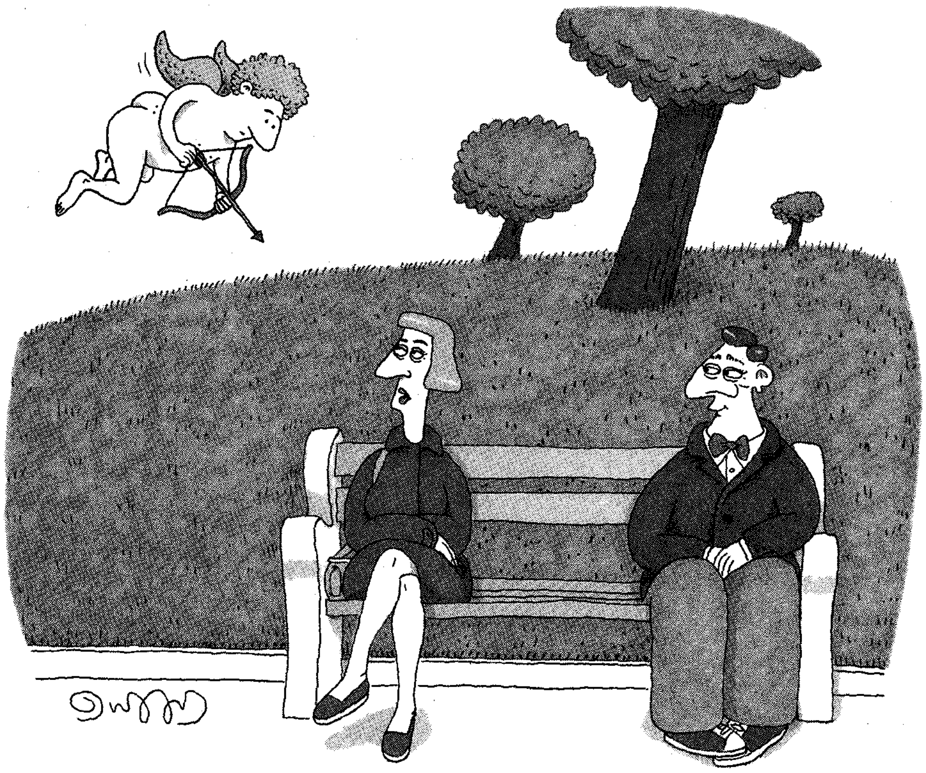
"*Here* we are!" I threw open his office door. I took his hat and placed it on its hook. I helped him free of his coat. Just as his face had grown bored, then irked, and finally enraged at our deception, the phone rang. From where I stood—half in the office, half in the hall—I could see Mom holding the white phone in the kitchen.

My father paused—since when did he answer the phone?—and, finally, flushed, reached for it himself. "Dick?" Mom said. "You'll hate me, I'm getting so absent-minded. But you did take your lunch along today, right? I mean, go check. Be patient with me, O.K.?" Phone cradled between his head and shoulder, he lifted his briefcase and snapped it open—his efficiency still water-clear, and scary. Dad then said to the receiver, "Lunch is definitely here, per usual. But, honey, haven't I told you about these personal calls at the office?"

Then I saw him bend to pick up scattered pages. I saw him touch one yellow legal pad and start to square all desk-top pens at sharp right angles. As he pulled the chair two inches forward I slowly shut his door behind me. Then Mother and I, hidden in the kitchen, held each other and, not expecting it, cried, if very, very silently.

When we peeked in two hours later, he was filing.

EVERY morning, Sundays included, Dad walked to the office. Even our ruse of walking him around the block was relaxed. Mom simply set a straw hat atop him (after Labor Day, she knew to switch to his gray). With his packed lunch, he would stride nine paces from the kitchen table, step in, and pull the door shut, muttering complaints of overwork, no rest ever.



"There's a twenty in it for you if you just keep moving."

Dad spent a lot of time on the phone. Long-distance directory-assistance charges constituted a large part of his monthly bill. But he "came home" for supper with the weary sense of blurred accomplishment we recalled from olden times.

Once, having dinner with them, I asked Dad how he was. He sighed. "Well, July is peak for getting their school supplies ordered. So the pressure is on. My heart's not what it was, heart's not completely in it lately, I admit. They downsized Green. Terrible loss to me. With its being crunch season, I get a certain shortness of breath. Suppliers aren't where they were, the gear is often second-rate, little of it any longer American-made. But you keep going, because it's what you know and because your clients count on you. I may be beat, but, hey—it's still a job."

"Aha," I said.

Mom received a call on her own line. It was from some kindergarten owner. Dad—plundering his old red address book—had somehow made himself a go-between, arranging sales, but working freelance now. He appeared to be doing it unsalaried, not for whole school systems but for small local outfits like day-care centers. This teacher had to let Mom know that he'd sent too much of the paste. No invoice with it, a pallet of free jarred white school paste waiting out under the swing sets. Whom to thank?

Once, I tiptoed in and saw a long list of figures he kept meaning to add up. I noticed that, in his desperate daily fight to keep his desk top clear, he'd placed seven separate five-inch piles of papers at evened intervals along the far wall. I found such ankle-level filing sad till slowly I recognized a pattern—oh, yeah, "The Pile System." It was my own technique for maintaining provisional emergency order, and one which I now rejudged to be quite sane.

Inked directly into the wooden bottom of his top desk drawer was this:

> Check Green's sick leave ridic. long. Nazis still soundly defeated. Double enter all new receipts, nincompoop. Yes, you . . . eighty-one. Old Woman roommate is: "Betty."

Mom felt safe holding bridge parties at the house again, telling friends that Dad was in there writing letters and doing paperwork, and who could say he wasn't? Days Mom could now shop or attend master-point tournaments at good-driving-distance hotels. In her own little kitchen-corner office, she entered bridge chat rooms, E-mailing game-theory arcana to well-known French and Russian players. She'd regained some weight and her face was fuller, and prettier for that. She bought herself a bottle-green velvet suit. "It's just a cheap Chanel knockoff, but these ol' legs still ain't that bad, hmm?" She looked more rested than I'd seen her in a year or two.

I cut a mail slot in Dad's office door, and around eleven Mom would slip in his today's *Wall Street Journal.* You'd hear him fall upon it like a zoo animal, fed.

SINCE Dad had tried to break down the headhunters' door I hadn't dared go on vacation myself. But Mother encouraged me to take my family to Hawaii. She laughed. "Go ahead, enjoy yourself, for Pete's sake. Everything under control. I'm playing what friends swear is my best bridge ever, and Dick's sure working good long hours again. By now I should know the drill, hunh?"

I was just getting into my bathing suit when the hotel phone rang. I could see my wife and son down there on the white beach.

"Honey? Me. There's news about your father."

Mom's voice sounded vexed but contained. Her businesslike tone seemed assigned. It let me understand.

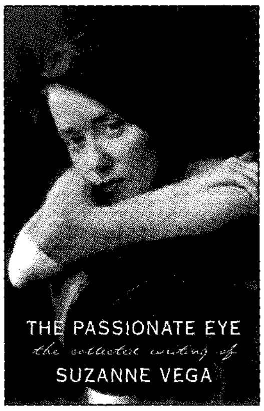
"When?"

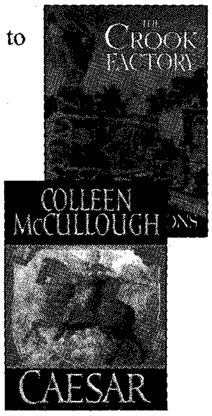
"This afternoon around six-thirty our time. Maybe it happened earlier, I don't know. I found him. First I convinced myself he was just asleep. But I guess, even earlier, I knew."

I stood here against glass, on holiday. I pictured my father face down at his desk. The tie still perfectly knotted, his hat yet safe on its hook. I imagined Dad's head at rest atop those forty pages of figures he kept meaning to add up.

I told Mom I was sorry; I said we'd fly right back.

"No, please," she said. "I've put everything off till next week. It's just us now. Why hurry? And, son? Along with the bad news, I think there's something good. He died at the office." ◆





(Advt.)

An internationally respected composer and performer, **Suzanne Vega** transforms experience into art. She does not write love songs, per se, but uses stinging, image-rich language to expose private crimes, inner wars, and the excruciating pain of need. ***THE PASSIONATE EYE*** is a new volume of her collected writings: poems and stories, interviews and song lyrics, overheard conversations and imagined thoughts, complex inner worlds realized in simple yet effective strokes. Vega's book focuses on one of her most arresting strengths as an artist: her ability to translate what her passionate eye observes into words that capture the depth, motion, and vibrant color of life.

Dan Simmons's ***THE CROOK FACTORY*** seamlessly blends true history and wildly inventive speculation. At the height of World War II, American literary icon Ernest Hemingway volunteered his services to the U.S. government, offering to run an espionage ring from his ranch in Cuba (a documented fact!). Simmons's novel—a tale rich in suspense, surprise, colorful characters, and lush Caribbean atmosphere—posits what might have happened had "Papa" undertaken his dangerous game. And it goes on to explore the possible consequences—to Hemingway, the U.S., the war, and the world—of the great writer's motley local crew of wannabe spies actually stumbling onto some critically important intelligence.

Colleen McCullough goes even further back in history to humanize one of the most mythic and extraordinary soldier/leaders ever to occupy the world stage: the "noblest Roman of them all," Gaius Julius Caesar. McCullough's ***CAESAR*** gives flesh, heart, and real substance to the great man as it re-creates his battles and victories, the vindictive intrigues of the Senate conspirators devoted to his downfall, and the grand destiny that propelled the unparalleled conqueror and statesman in triumph to the banks of the Rubicon and beyond, into legend.

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

RUNNING FROM RITALIN

Is the hectic pace of contemporary life really to blame for A.D.D.? Not so fast.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

THERE has always been a temptation in American culture to think of drugs as social metaphors. In the early sixties, the pharmaceutical metaphor for the times was Valium. During the sexual revolution, it was the Pill, and that was followed, in quick succession, by marijuana in the nineteen-seventies, cocaine in the nineteen-eighties, and Prozac in the early nineteen-nineties. Today, of course, the drug that has come to symbolize our particular predicaments is Ritalin, the widely prescribed treatment for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or attention-deficit disorder, as it is more popularly known. In his new book, "The Hyperactivity Hoax," the neuropsychiatrist Sydney Walker calls attention disorders and the rise of Ritalin "symptoms of modern life, rather than symptoms of modern disease." In "Ritalin Nation" the psychologist Richard DeGrandpre argues that Ritalin and A.D.H.D. are the inevitable byproducts of a culture-wide addiction to speed—to cellular phones and beepers and faxes and overnight mail and computers with powerful chips and hard-driving rock music and television shows that splice together images at hundredth-of-a-second intervals, and a thousand other social stimulants that have had the effect of transforming human expectations. The soaring use of Ritalin, the physician Lawrence Diller concludes in his new book, "Running on Ritalin,"

> reveals something about the kind of society we are at the turn of the millennium.... It throws a spotlight on some of our most sensitive issues: what kind of parents we are, what kind of schools we have, what kind of health care is available to us. It brings into question our cultural standards for behavior, performance, and punishment; it reaches into the workplace, the courts and the halls of Congress. It highlights the most basic psychological conundrum of nature versus nurture, and it raises fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of free will and responsibility.

In a recent *Time* cover story on Ritalin, the mother of a child with A.D.H.D. is described as tearing up her daughter's Ritalin prescription. "I thought, maybe there is something else we can do," she says. "I knew that medicine can mask things." That is the kind of question that Ritalin provokes—not the simple, traditional "Will this cure my child?" but the harder, postmodern question "In curing my child, what deeper pathology might this drug be hiding?"

It's important that we ask questions like this, particularly of drugs that are widely used. The problem with Ritalin is that many of the claims made to support the drug's status as a symbol turn out, on closer examination, to be vague or confusing. Diller, DeGrandpre, and Walker are all, for example, deeply suspicious of our reliance on Ritalin. They think that it is overprescribed—that it is being used to avoid facing broader questions about our values and our society. This sounds plausible: the amount of Ritalin consumed in the United States has more than tripled since 1990. Then again, it has been only in the last ten years that clinical trials have definitively proved that Ritalin is effective in treating A.D.H.D. And, even with that dramatic increase, the number of American children taking Ritalin is estimated to be one or two per cent. Given that most estimates put the incidence of A.D.H.D. at between three and five per cent, are too many children taking the drug—or too few? "You really run into problems with teen-agers," William Pelham, a professor of psychology at SUNY Buffalo and a prominent A.D.H.D. expert, told me. "They don't want to take this medication. They don't feel they need to. It's part of the oppositional stuff you run into. The kids whom you most want to take it are the ones who are aggressive, and they are the most likely to blow it off."

Or consider how A.D.H.D. is defined. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV, a child has A.D.H.D. if, for a period of six months, he or she exhibits at least six symptoms from a list of behavioral signs. Among them: "often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities," "often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly," "is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli," "is often 'on the go' or acts as if 'driven by a motor,'" and "often blurts out answers before questions have been completed," and so on. "Ritalin Nation" argues that all these are essentially symptoms of boredom—the impatience of those used to the rapid-fire pace of MTV, Nintendo, and the rest of contemporary culture. The A.D.H.D. child blurts out answers before questions have been completed because, DeGrandpre says, "listening is usually a waiting situation that provides a low level of stimulation." The A.D.H.D. child is easily distracted because, "by definition, extraneous stimuli are novel." Give A.D.H.D. kids something novel to do, something that can satisfy their addiction, DeGrandpre argues, and they'll be fine. Diller works with a different definition of A.D.H.D. but comes to some of the same conclusions. High-stimulus activities like TV and video games "constitute a strange sort of good-fit situation for distractible children," he writes. "These activities are among the few things they *can* concentrate on well."

WHEN A.D.H.D. kids are actually tested on activities like video games, however, this alleged "good fit" disappears. Rosemary Tannock, a behavioral scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children, in Toronto, recently looked at how well a group of boys between the ages of eight and twelve actually did at PacMan and Super Mario World, and she found that the ones with A.D.H.D. completed fewer levels and had to re-start more games than their unaffected peers. "They often failed to inhibit their forward trajectory and crashed headlong into obstacles," she explained. A.D.H.D. kids may like the stimulation of a video game, but that doesn't mean they can handle it. Tannock has also given a group of A.D.H.D. children what's called a letter-

Since far more children have attention disorders than take Ritalin, why are we so sure that the drug is overprescribed?

naming test. The child is asked to read as quickly as he can five rows of letters, each of which consists of five letters repeated in different orders—"A, B, C, D, E," for example, followed by "D, E, B, A, C," and so on. A normal eight-year-old might take twenty-five seconds to complete the list. His counterpart with attention deficit might take thirty-five seconds, which is the kind of performance usually associated with dyslexia. "Some of our most articulate [A.D.H.D.] youngsters describe how doing this test is like speaking a foreign language in a foreign land," Tannock told me. "You get exhausted. That's how they feel. They have a thousand different ideas crowding into their heads at the same time." This doesn't sound like a child attuned to the quicksilver rhythms of the modern age. This sounds like a garden-variety learning disorder.

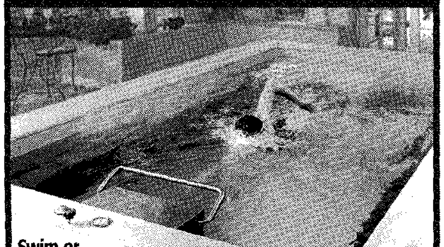
What further confounds the culture-of-Ritalin school is that A.D.H.D. turns out to have a considerable genetic component. As a result of numerous studies of twins conducted around the world over the past decade, scientists now estimate that A.D.H.D. is about seventy per cent heritable. This puts it up there with the most genetically influenced of traits—traits such as blood pressure, height, and weight. Meanwhile, the remaining thirty per cent—the environmental contribution to the disorder—seems to fall under what behavioral geneticists call "non-shared environment," meaning that it is likely to be attributable to such factors as fetal environment or illness and injury rather than factors that siblings share, such as parenting styles or socioeconomic class. That's why the way researchers describe A.D.H.D. has changed over the past decade. There is now less discussion of the role of bad parents, television, and diet and a lot more discussion of neurology and the role of specific genes.

This doesn't mean that there is no social role at all in the expression of A.D.H.D. Clearly, something has happened to make us all suddenly more aware of the disorder. But when, for instance, Diller writes that "the conditions that have fueled the A.D.D. epidemic and the Ritalin boom" will not change until "America somehow regains its balance between material gain and emotional and spiritual satisfaction," it's clear that he is working with a definition of A.D.H.D. very different from that of the scientific mainstream. In fact, books like "Running on Ritalin" and "Ritalin Nation" don't seem to have a coherent definition of A.D.H.D. at all. This is what is so confusing about the popular debate over this disorder: it's backward. We've become obsessed with what A.D.H.D. means. Don't we first have to figure out what it is?

ONE of the tests researchers give to children with A.D.H.D. is called a stop-signal task. A child sits down at a computer and is told to hit one key if he sees an "X" on the screen and another key if he sees an "O." If he hears a tone, however, he is to refrain from hitting the key. By changing the timing of the tone—playing it just before or just as or just a millisecond after the "X" or "O" appears on the screen—you can get a very good idea of how well someone reacts. "Kids with A.D.H.D. have a characteristically longer reaction time," Gordon Logan, a cognitive psychologist at the University of Illinois, told me. "They're fifty per cent slower than other kids." Unless the tone is played very early, giving them plenty of warning, they can't stop themselves from hitting the keys.

The results may seem a relatively trivial matter—these are differences measured in fractions of a second, after all. But for many researchers the idea that children with A.D.H.D. lack some fundamental ability to inhibit themselves, to stop a pre-programmed action, is at the heart of the disorder. Suppose, for example, that you have been given a particularly difficult math problem. Your immediate, impulsive response might be to throw down your pencil in frustration. But most of us wouldn't do that. We would check those impulses, and try to slog our way through the problem, and, with luck, maybe get it right. Part of what it takes to succeed in a complex world, in other words, is the ability to inhibit our impulses. But the child with A.D.H.D., according to the official diagnosis, "often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace" and "often runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate." He cannot apply himself because he cannot regulate his behavior in a consistent manner. He is at the mercy of the temptations and distractions in his immediate environment. "It's not that a child or an individual is always hyperactive or always inattentive or distracted," Tannock says. "The same individual can one minute be restless and fidgeting or the next minute lethargic or yawning. The individual can be overfocussed one minute and incredibly distractible the next. It is this variability, from day to day and moment to moment, that is the most robust finding we have."

Russell Barkley, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts at Worcester, has done experiments that look at the way A.D.H.D. kids experience time, and the results demonstrate how this basic problem with self-regulation can have far-reaching consequences. In one experiment, he turns on a light for a predetermined length of time and then asks a child to turn the light back on and off for what the child guesses to be the same interval. Children without A.D.H.D. perform fairly consistently. At twelve seconds, for example, their guesses are just a little low. At thirty-six seconds, they are slightly less accurate—still on the low side—and at sixty seconds their guesses are coming in at about fifty seconds. A.D.H.D. kids, on the other hand, are terrible at this game. At twelve seconds, they are well over; apparently, twelve seconds seems much, much longer to them. But at sixty seconds their guesses are much lower than everyone else's; apparently, the longer interval is impossible to comprehend. The consequences of having so profoundly subjective a sense of time are obvious. It's no surprise that people with A.D.H.D. often have problems with punctuality and with patience. An accurate sense of time is a function of a certain kind of memory—an ability to compare the duration of ongoing events with that of past events, so that a red light doesn't seem like an outrageous imposition, or five minutes doesn't seem so impossibly long that you can imagine getting from one side of town to the other in that



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amount of time. Time is about imposing order, about exercising control over one's perceptions, and that's something that people with attention deficit have trouble with.

This way of thinking about A.D.H.D. clarifies some of the more confusing aspects of the disorder. In DeGrandpre's formulation, the A.D.H.D. child can't follow through on instructions or behaves inappropriately because there isn't enough going on in his environment. What the inhibition theory implies is the opposite: that the A.D.H.D. child can't follow through or behaves inappropriately because there is too much going on; he falters in situations that require him to exercise self-control and his higher cognitive skills. DeGrandpre cannot explain why A.D.H.D. kids like video games but are also so bad at them. Shouldn't they thrive in that most stimulating of environments? If their problem is self-control, that apparent contradiction makes perfect sense. The A.D.H.D. child likes video games because they permit—even encourage—him to play impulsively. But he's not very good at them because to succeed at PacMan or Super Mario World a child must learn to overcome the temptation posed by those games to respond impulsively to every whiz and bang: the child has to learn to stop and think (ever so quickly) before reacting.

At the same time, this theory makes it a lot clearer what kind of problem A.D.H.D. represents. The fact that children with the disorder can't finish the hard math problem doesn't mean that they're not smart enough to know the answer. It means they can't focus long enough to get to the answer. As Barkley puts it, A.D.H.D. is a problem not of knowing what you should do but, rather, of doing what you know. Motivation and memory and higher cognitive skills are intact in people with attention deficit. "But they are secondarily delayed," Barkley says. "They have no chance. They are rarely engaged and highly ineffective, because impulsive actions take precedence." The inability to stop pressing that "X" or "O" key ends up causing much more serious problems down the road.

This way of thinking about A.D.H.D. also demystifies Ritalin. Implicit in the popular skepticism about the drug has always been the idea that you cannot truly remedy something as complicated as A.D.H.D. with a pill. That's why the mother quoted in the *Time* story ripped up her child's Ritalin prescription, and why Diller places so much emphasis on the need for "real" social and spiritual solutions. But if A.D.H.D. is merely a discrete problem in inhibition why couldn't Ritalin be a complete solution? People with A.D.H.D. don't need a brain overhaul. They just need a little help with stopping.

THERE is another way to look at the A.D.H.D.-Ritalin question, which is known as the dopamine theory. This is by no means a conclusive account of A.D.H.D., but it may help clarify some of the issues surrounding the disorder. Dopamine is the chemical in the brain—the neurotransmitter—that appears to play a major role in things like attention and inhibition. When you tackle a difficult task or pay attention to a complex social situation, you are essentially generating dopamine in the parts of the brain that deal with higher cognitive tasks. If you looked at a thousand people at random, you would find a huge variation in their dopamine systems, just as you would if you looked at, say, blood pressure in a random population. A.D.H.D., according to this theory, is the name we give to people whose dopamine falls at the lower end of the scale, the same way we say that people suffer from hypertension if their blood pressure is above a certain point. In order to get normal levels of attention and inhibition, you have to produce normal levels of dopamine.

This is what Ritalin does. Dopamine is manufactured in the brain by special receptors, and each of those receptors has a "transport," a kind of built-in vacuum cleaner that sucks up any excess dopamine floating around and stores it inside the neuron. Ritalin shuts down that transport, so the amount of dopamine available for cognition remains higher than it would be otherwise. In about sixty-five per cent of those who take the drug, Ritalin appears to make them "normal," and in an additional ten per cent it appears to bring about substantial improvement. It does have a few minor side effects—appetite loss and insomnia, in some users—but by and large it's a remarkably safe drug, with remarkably specific effects.

So what does the fact that we seem

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Tesseract, by Alex Garland (Riverhead; $24.95). A misunderstanding between a Filipino Mafia lord and a jittery English merchant briefly brings together disparate characters in Manila, among them Jojo, the don's sensitive henchman; Rosa, a young doctor who lives with her family in the suburbs; and Alfredo, a heartbroken psychologist who pays to hear the dreams of the city's street children. Garland is a gifted storyteller whose use of language is reminiscent of Graham Greene's. His ambitious second novel is like the charm carried by one of its characters: at once consoling and intoxicatingly alien.

In the Pond, by Ha Jin (Zoland; $20). When Shao Bin, in post-Cultural Revolution China, is not among the chosen few for new housing, his wife berates him for not bribing the powers that be. Instead, Bin, a factory worker with a talent for cartooning, takes aim against the bosses' corruption and gets his cartoons published. Not surprisingly, the clownishly wicked bosses maintain an arsenal for zapping such gnats, and it seems that the war can have only the grimmest conclusion. But the author is as resourceful as his hero, and the simplicity of the narrative proves deceptive.

The Vintner's Luck, by Elizabeth Knox (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23). In this wily novel, Sobran, a successful Burgundian winemaker whose wayward youth was spent in Napoleon's Grand Army, comes to regard his luck as a matter of individual will rather than divine intervention—a radical thought at the time. But in Knox's ingenious take on the consequences of the Enlightenment, Sobran manages to turn away from the church and adopt empirical techniques in his winemaking only with the help of a clandestine lifelong friend, who is, plausibly enough, an angel.

Sister of My Heart, by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (Doubleday; $23.95). Cousins Sudha and Anju—one fair, one plain, both fatherless—are raised amid the ruins of the Chatterjee fortune. The fairy-tale plot is thick with boldface secrets and surmises: Will Sudha elope with her true love? Will Anju escape Calcutta and be allowed to go to college? But Divakaruni's gift asserts itself in her moving portraits of Gouri, Nalini, and Pishi, the three acrimonious women—sharp-tongued one minute, compassionate the next—who bring the girls up.

The Girl with the Golden Eyes, by Honoré de Balzac, translated from the French by Carol Cosman (Carroll & Graf; $17.95). Gender politics may be the reason for this new translation of Balzac's 1835 novella, from his trilogy "History of the Thirteen": its tale of jealous rivalry involves lesbianism. A beautiful, nobly born fellow meets a gorgeous exotic who turns out to have been sold into sexual slavery. They have a mad, and then a madder, night of love before her female owner appears. Best, though, is the chilling finale, when the hot-blooded rivals display hearts of ice.

to be relying more and more on Ritalin mean? The beginning of the answer, I think, lies in the fact that Ritalin is not the only drug in existence that enhances dopamine. Cocaine affects the brain in almost exactly the same way. Nicotine, too, is a dopamine booster, although its mechanism is somewhat different. Obviously, taking Ritalin doesn't have the same consequences as snorting cocaine or smoking a cigarette. It's not addictive, and its effect is a lot more specific. Still, nicotine, cocaine, and Ritalin are all performing the same basic neurological function.

What, for instance, was the appeal of cocaine at the beginning of the coke epidemic of the eighties? It was a feel-good drug. But it was a feel-good drug of a certain kind—a drug that people thought would help them master the complexity and the competitive pressures of the world around them. In the now infamous *Time* story on cocaine that ran in the summer of 1981, there is a picture of a "freelance artist" in Manhattan doing lines on his lunch break, with the caption "Feeling stronger, smarter, faster, more able to cope." Cocaine, the article begins, "is becoming the all-American drug," and its popularity, in the words of one expert, is a symptom of the fact that "right from childhood in this country there is pressure for accomplishment." At the moment of its greatest popularity, cocaine was considered a thinking drug, an achievement drug, a drug for the modern world. Does that sound familiar?

Nicotine has a similar profile. Cigarettes aid concentration. Understandably, this isn't a fact that has received much publicity in recent years. But there are plenty of data showing that nicotine does exactly what you would expect a dopamine enhancer to do. In one experiment, for example, smokers were given three minutes to read randomly ordered letters, in rows of thirty, and cross out the letter "e" every time they encountered it. The smokers took the test twice, before and after smoking a cigarette, and, on average, they were able to read 161.5 more letters—or more than five extra lines—after smoking than before. It's no surprise that this test sounds a lot like the test that A.D.H.D. kids do so poorly on, because we are really talking about the same set of cognitive skills—the ability to concentrate and screen out distractions. Numerous studies have shown that children with A.D.H.D. are much more likely to smoke and take illegal drugs in later life; what the dopamine theory suggests is that many people resort to such substances as a way of medicating themselves. Nora Volkow, the chairman of medicine at Brookhaven National Laboratory, says that between ten and twenty per cent of drug addicts have A.D.H.D. "In studies, when they were given Ritalin they would stop taking cocaine," she told me. Timothy Wilens, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, presented data at a recent National Institutes of Health conference on A.D.H.D. which showed that treating A.D.H.D. kids with Ritalin and the like lowered the risk of their developing drug problems in adolescence by an extraordinary sixty-eight per cent. Among people with dopamine deficits, Ritalin is becoming a safe pharmaceutical alternative to the more dangerous dopamine boosters of the past.

Here, surely, is one of the deeper implications of the rise of Ritalin—particularly among adults, whose use of the drug has increased rapidly in recent years. For decades, in this country and around the world, millions of people used smoking as a way of boosting their dopamine and sharpening focus and concentration. Over the past twenty years, we have gradually taken away that privilege, by making it impossible for people to smoke at work and by marshalling an array of medical evidence to convince people that they should not start at all. From a public-health standpoint, this has been of critical importance: countless lives have been saved. But the fact remains that millions of people have lost a powerful pharmacological agent—nicotine—that they had been using to cope with the world around them. In fact, they have lost it precisely at a moment when the rising complexity of modern life would seem to make dopamine enhancement more important than ever. Among adults, Ritalin is a drug that may fill the void left by nicotine.

Among children, Ritalin is clearly performing a similar function. We are extending to the young cognitive aids of a kind that used to be reserved exclusively for the old. It is this reliance on a drug—the idea that children should have to be medicated—that, of course, people like Diller, Walker, and DeGrandpre find so upsetting. If some children need to take a drug in order to be "normal," they think that the problem is with our definition of "normal." Diller asks, "Is there still a place for childhood in the anxious, downsizing America of the late nineteen-nineties? What if Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn were to walk into my office tomorrow? Tom's indifference to schooling and Huck's 'oppositional' behavior would surely have been cause for concern. Would I prescribe Ritalin for them, too?" But this is just the point. Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer lived in an age where difficult children simply dropped out of school, or worked on farms, or drifted into poverty and violence. The "childhood" Diller romanticizes was a ruthlessly Darwinian place, which provided only for the most economically—and genetically—privileged. Children are now being put into situations that demand attention and intellectual consideration, and it is no longer considered appropriate simply to cast aside those who because of some neurological quirk have difficulty coping. Only by a strange inversion of moral responsibility do books like "Ritalin Nation" and "Running on Ritalin" seek to make those parents and physicians trying to help children with A.D.H.D. feel guilty for doing so. The rise of A.D.H.D. is a consequence of what might otherwise be considered a good thing: that the world we live in increasingly values intellectual consideration and rationality—increasingly demands that we stop and focus. Modernity didn't create A.D.H.D. It revealed it. ♦

POWER PLAY

"We all have knives. It is 1183, and we're barbarians," Eleanor of Aquitaine says to her sons, in "The Lion in Winter," James Goldman's 1966 black comedy about the bitter dealings of an early royal family. In a Roundabout Theatre staging that begins February 17th, Stockard Channing and Laurence Fishburne bring fresh blood to the roles of the imprisoned queen and her beleaguered Plantagenet king, Henry II, who nearly destroy each other trying to choose an heir to the throne from their ruthless brood (which includes King John of Magna Carta fame and Richard the Lion-Hearted).

Photograph by Max Vadukul

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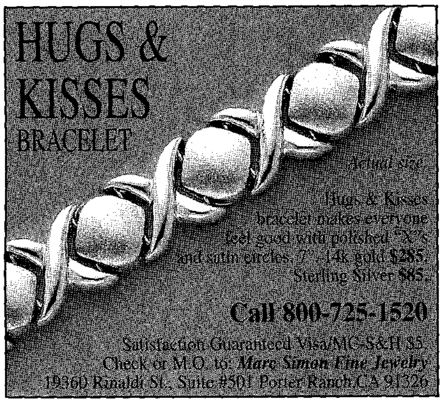

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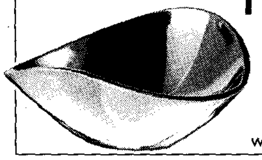

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THE SKY LINE

WHY WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

Mount Vernon is a nicer house than we thought it was.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

THE more familiar a building is to you through photographs, the smaller it seems when you finally visit it—unless it is the Taj Mahal or the Eiffel Tower. Most famous buildings, like movie stars, loom much larger in the imagination than they do in real life. Small does not mean trivial, however. An iconic building's smallness can make the experience of seeing it for the first time more intense, as if all the building's symbolic force were compressed into a tight, taut, powerful package. I felt this when I first saw Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, buildings that I had spent my student years craving to visit. And I felt this way again just a couple of weeks ago, when I finally got around to seeing Mount Vernon, a house that I had never taken seriously as architecture at all. This year is the bicentennial of George Washington's death, and a spate of scholarly studies and exhibitions have drawn attention to Mount Vernon, making the case that Washington was as passionate an architectural amateur as Thomas Jefferson, and as much the author of his own house as Jefferson was of Monticello.

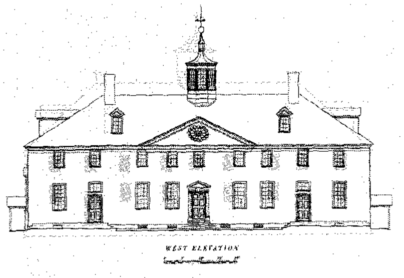
Monticello is much more revered than Mount Vernon, which does not even show up in most architectural histories, although Washington's house is as well known a building as any in the United States. Unfortunately, its fame has contributed to its banality. Mount Vernon's red roof, narrow cupola, and expansive colonnade have become generic, and have influenced everything from Howard Johnson's restaurants to suburban tract houses. Mount Vernon, or the idea of Mount Vernon, exudes a kind of kitschy Americanness that stems in part from its association with its owner. George Washington is a wooden figure to most of us, a farmer who had greatness thrust upon him. He isn't as interesting intellectually as Jefferson. It is an axiom of American architectural history that Jefferson was the finest amateur architect we have ever produced and that his life marked the first and last time that architectural talent has intersected with great statesmanship in this country.

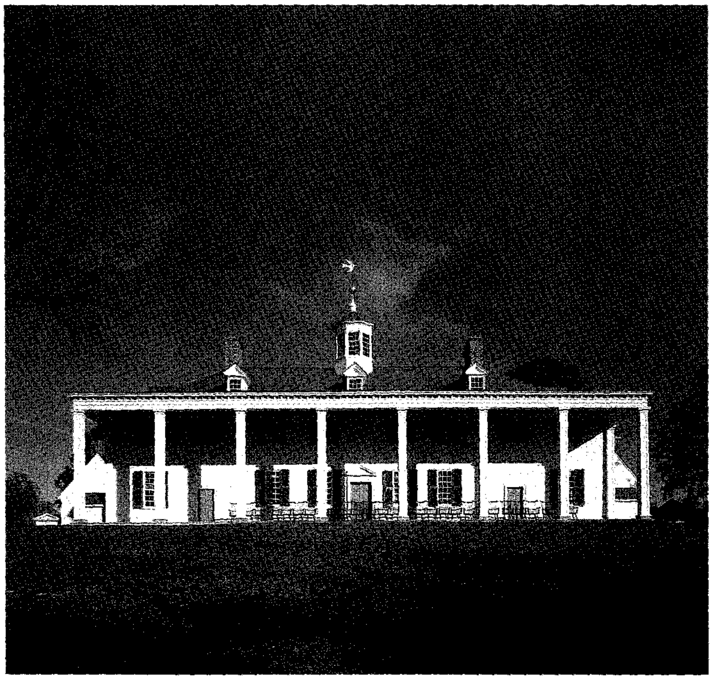
While it is true that Washington was not as sophisticated as Jefferson, or as erudite, Mount Vernon has a kind of brazen panache that the more cerebral Monticello does not. Washington designed with a curious combination of caution and bold strokes, and his work as an "architect" turned out to presage American taste far more than anything produced by Jefferson, who was idiosyncratic and occasionally effete. On reconsideration, Mount Vernon appears, quite startlingly, to be the most influential eighteenth-century house in America, and one of the greatest.

A LARGE house of white painted wood crafted to look like rusticated stone, Mount Vernon is integrated into the landscape more seamlessly than any other house of its time, and it combines grandeur and intimacy in a way that no house had done before. Like Monticello, which was begun in 1769 and which Jefferson expanded and radically changed over the years, Mount Vernon began as a much smaller house. When Washington leased it from the widow of his half brother, in 1754, for an annual rent of fifteen thousand pounds of tobacco, it was a one-and-a-half-story, eight-room farmhouse. Washington turned it into a mansion during several building campaigns, each of which lasted many years, and when he was finished Mount Vernon was a house of three stories, with twenty-one rooms plus outbuildings. Washington had a kind of gut feeling about what he was after. His ideas, he wrote to his friend Dr. William Thornton, the first architect of the Capitol, "proceed from a person who avows his ignorance of Architectural principles, and who has no other guide but his eye to direct his choice."

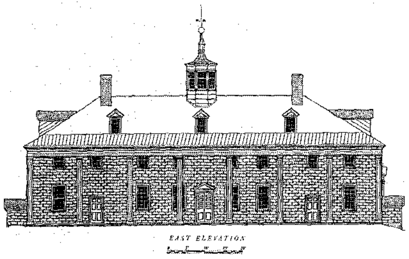
It was an unusual eye indeed, for it led Washington to create four asymmetrical façades at a time when symmetry was considered a sign of refinement, particularly in a house that aspired to serious pomp. Many of the windows are off center, especially on the west side, and the cupola and the pediment, which in any self-respecting classical house line up, in Washington's don't. Washington also ran a colonnade of double-height, squared-off columns across one entire side of his house, facing the Potomac River; this was at once a plainer and more monumental device than anything in a comparable house. Outdoors, his eye inspired him to cut a path nearly three-quarters of a mile long through the woods between the house and the front gate, not as a road but purely as a scenic vista. These were not the decisions of a man who was uncomfortable speaking through architecture.

The scenic vista is what first made me realize that Mount Vernon is not a cliché but a work of genius. I got a whiff of it in the splendid photographs and drawings in "George Washington's Mount Vernon," an elaborate coffee-table study edited by Wendell Garrett (Monacelli Press; $65); it was not until I visited the house, though, that I truly understood what Washington was up to. I was given a tour by Allan Greenberg, a Washington architect who has been trying for years to get the world to put Mount Vernon on a par with Monticello, and who is the author of a new architectural study of the house ("George Washington: Architect"; Andreas Papadakis; $65). Greenberg is a contemporary classicist who, in addition to designing such projects as the diplomatic reception rooms for the State Department, created a near-replica of Mount Vernon in Greenwich, Connecticut, even bigger than Washington's, for the art collectors Peter and Sandy Brant.





Washington's most striking architectural innovation was the colonnaded veranda (center), which faces the Potomac River.



(Greenberg's form of homage was a little odd. He corrected Washington's asymmetries and put an indoor swimming pool in the outer wing that had been Washington's kitchen.)

Greenberg, along with Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., and Lee Baldwin Dalzell, the authors of a historical study also called "George Washington's Mount Vernon" (Oxford; $30), has made a strong case for the quality of Mount Vernon and for Washington's responsibility for every detail of its design. So committed was Washington to rebuilding his house that during the most intense battles of the Revolution he kept the work going, and wrote weekly from the front to his construction managers. "As mastery of his troops, of Congress, of the larger military situation continued to elude him," the Dalzells write, "he had created in his mind a world at home wholly amenable to his control, one where his every wish would be followed to the letter."

Washington's plantations originally encompassed more than eight thousand acres, or upward of twelve square miles, much of which was sold off in the nineteenth century. Roughly five hundred and fifty acres remain. They are owned by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, which is the corporate name for the entity that purchased the house, in 1858, for two hundred thousand dollars from John Augustine Washington, Jr., the son of Washington's nephew's nephew. Mount Vernon was badly run down by the mid-nineteenth century; John Augustine was not nearly as skillful a farmer as his celebrated ancestor had been, and he was further burdened by tourists seeking to visit the house, which even in its decline was viewed as a shrine. He offered to sell the house and two hundred acres to the federal government; it turned him down, but he was rescued by a thirty-seven-year-old semi-invalid from South Carolina, Ann Pamela Cunningham. Miss Cunningham's mother had been travelling up the Potomac on a passenger steamer in 1853 and wrote to her daughter about the shock of seeing how dilapidated Mount Vernon was. Miss Cunningham was moved by the plight of the great house and made saving it her life's work. She formed the Ladies' Association, the first organization in this country that was devoted solely to historic preservation, and set in motion what was to become the first successful rescue of a major landmark in the nation's history.

MOUNT VERNON sits in a part of Virginia that has become increasingly suburbanized in recent years; there are tract-house imitations of Mount Vernon within sight of its original gates. Development has been limited along the roads approaching the house, however, and as you drive up to it you feel, for the last few minutes, if not quite at Yellowstone, at least more than fifteen miles from Washington, D.C. Allan Greenberg introduced me to the property by showing me how Washington meant a visitor to come across it for the first time. He parked the car near the Ladies' Association office, a red brick building tucked into a corner of the grounds that looks more or less as though it might house a prosperous suburban medical practice. We walked away from the building and along a newly paved asphalt drive leading into the woods and down a steep hill, after which the asphalt gives way to a dirt road. We climbed another hill and kept walking through the woods for another quarter-mile or so. Mount Vernon itself was nowhere visible, but in the distance, up ahead, was an old, white painted wooden gate, closed and obviously little used.

When we reached the gate, roughly half a mile from where we had left the car, we turned around. Suddenly, there was Mount Vernon, about three-quarters of a mile to the east, a glimmer of white and red across a wide swath of meadow, framed by trees. The meadow itself dipped down into a ravine, and back up; Washington had designed the vista so that the visitor's eye would be pulled straight across the undulating landscape to the house itself. "You can see from here why the roof was painted red, and there were dormers and the cupola," Greenberg said. "It was all scaled to be seen from here. This is the thing to see—this is the way into George Washington's mind. It takes the landscape and alters it in the most subtle way."

Washington merged the axes of French classicism—think Versailles—with the picturesque, flowing forms of English landscape design. His house pulls you in and appears to control the landscape; as you move toward it through the landscape, it disappears; and then it reappears, closer and more formal, sitting at the head of an open lawn. This is a magnificently choreographed approach, which visitors now never see unless they walk away from the standard tourist route.

Washington planned the gardens, situated the trees that were added when the virgin forest was torn down, and laid out all the estate's outbuildings, including the unusual open, curving arcades that connect some of them to the main house. His most striking architectural innovation was what he called "the piazza," the two-story colonnade on the east side of Mount Vernon, facing the river. It was grander than a normal portico, although it was not the entrance to the house. Washington put Mount Vernon's front door on the side of the house facing west, away from the river. Yet the piazza is hardly a riverfront porch, either. It is more like a monumental grandstand, a sprawling private box from which to view the river and the passing boat traffic. It is also the place where the occupants of Mount Vernon could mix together most easily—what the Dalzells call "a remarkably open space in a social as well as a physical sense." The piazza affirmed Washington's democratic vision.

IT is this aspect of Mount Vernon that distinguishes it most explicitly from Monticello. Jefferson studied classical architecture rigorously, and he encouraged its revival in the belief that classicism was the ideal style to represent American democracy. But Monticello, with its soft, low dome and inward focus, does not represent democratic openness so much as Jeffersonian refinement. Jefferson's extraordinary intellect is at the center of Monticello, both conceptually and physically. There is nothing universal about the architecture. Its meaning comes from its connection to Jefferson's psyche, and its pleasures from the extent to which you can penetrate that psyche. Washington created a building that asserts the democratic idea so powerfully that it can only be called radical. Washington was hardly indifferent to privacy—one of his innovations at Mount Vernon is a two-story private suite within the house, a vertically stacked combination of study and bedroom which allowed him to move around out of view of guests—but the private spaces were not the driving force in the design. Pride of place at Mount Vernon goes to shared spaces, to entertaining space, and to the sweeping riverfront piazza.

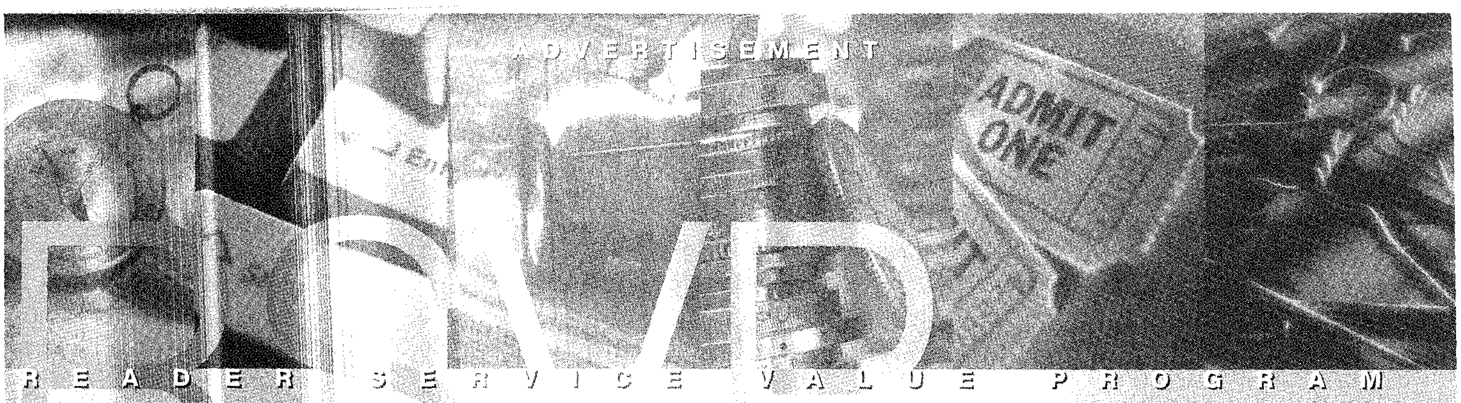
Mount Vernon is a sometimes lyrical, sometimes awkward combination of elements which exposes a yearning for things English and yet is confidently American. It is full of signs of its owner's determination to show off his status and his fortune to the world. Washington fought the British on the battlefield, but he collapsed entirely before them aesthetically, filling his house with furniture, china, and architectural details typical of upwardly mobile British taste of the late eighteenth century. The taste was conventional; the uses to which Washington put it were not. No one has known quite what to make of the building's lack of symmetry, but Allan Greenberg is sure that it was intentional. "This man planned everything—everything was an aesthetic question to him," he said to me as we walked across the lawn, looking at the strange, off-center features of the west façade. "I can't believe he didn't intend the asymmetry—he would only have had to move four windows." But if Washington wanted the house to be asymmetrical, why? What made this man of relatively routine, upper-class taste break the rules so willingly?

It may have been simply that Washington was being practical—in an American sort of way. He was ambitious but deeply pragmatic, and he gave no indication of being particularly concerned with perfect order. He could be seen as a sort of enlightened C.E.O., one of those types who combine commanding leadership with a tentative but eager aesthetic sense. He had high aims for his house, but he was not obsessed with minutiae, and it may be that to him symmetry fell into the category of a minor detail. Washington wanted Mount Vernon to be a model for others—to be for houses what he wanted his Presidency to be for Presidents. He was less learned than Jefferson but more open to experience: he looked around, he observed, he saw all kinds of things he liked and synthesized them. He did not think about architecture as obsessively as Jefferson did, but he revelled in it. You can see how he must have infuriated Jefferson—this man who didn't study the classics, who probably never thought about Palladio, producing an American icon, by instinct alone. ♦

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK

[*From the International Herald Tribune*]

LOTS OF OLD PEOPLE BORN TODAY



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Generous helpings of Korngold and Elgar.

BY ALEX ROSS

THERE may be contrarians who think that Bach is dry, or that Mozart is facile, or that Beethoven is brutish, or what have you, but they keep quiet. Year after year, the major composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are voted into greatness in uncontested elections. The spirit of musical bipartisanship breaks down in the twentieth century: whole areas of modern music are consigned to the rubbish heap on arbitrary principles. Some people refuse to listen to atonal music. Others refuse to listen to tonal music. A composer like Olivier Messiaen is considered either sublime or saccharine. The twentieth-century repertoire shows no sign of settling down into a smooth procession of nineteenth-century-style giants. The problem, I think, is the disappearance of a musical lingua franca. As Charles Rosen has pointed out, composers have had to rely more heavily than ever before on mannerisms—a set of signature melodic and harmonic tricks that are repeated endlessly in the course of a composition. Mannerisms in composers are very much like mannerisms in people: you may be charmed by the way an acquaintance inserts "or what have you" into every sentence or you may be driven mad by it.

Call it the Elgar/Korngold dilemma. Edward Elgar, the lofty Edwardian symphonist and oratorio writer, and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, the excitable fin-de-siècle Viennese prodigy turned Hollywood film composer, were given unusual attention in New York in the last two weeks of January: the London Symphony Orchestra played three consecutive Elgar programs at Avery Fisher Hall, while the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center presented a virtually unprecedented all-Korngold evening. Elgar and Korngold are alike in many ways: they both purvey a highly stylized version of late Romanticism, and they straddle the border between classical music and classical kitsch. Elgar can't seem to shake an air of fusty pomp—although the prominence of his Cello Concerto in the movie "Hilary and Jackie" has given him a hint of glitz. Korngold's music conjures instant flashbacks of Errol Flynn swashbucklers. Something in these two composers is alienating to highbrow taste: they are too eager to please, their secrets are all on the surface. I myself have an irrational fondness for Korngold's music and an irrational dislike of Elgar's. It's a matter of preferring Sacher torte to sherry trifle.

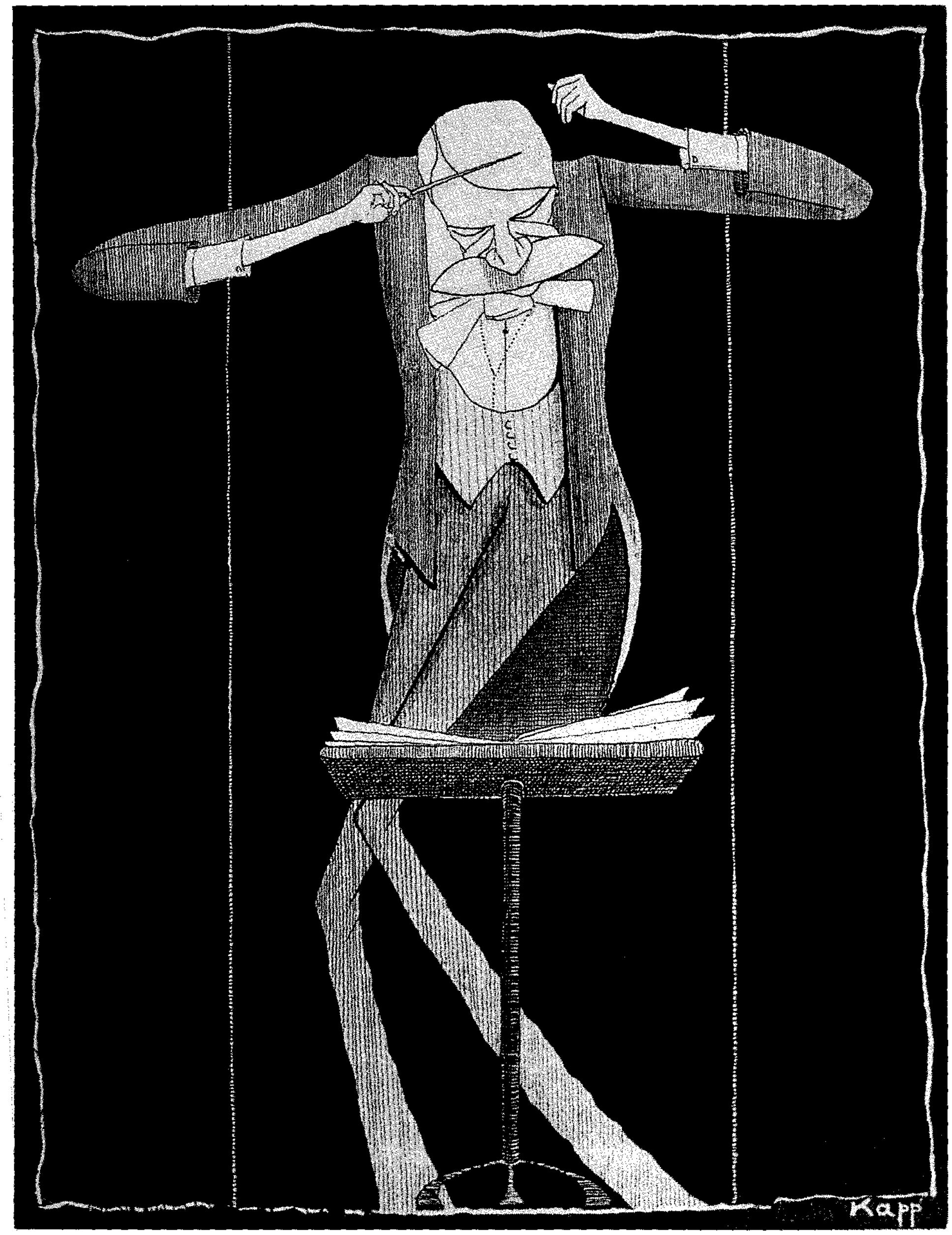
THE occasion for the feast of Elgariana was the second annual wintertime visit by the London Symphony—a collaboration with Lincoln Center's furiously inventive Great Performers series. As with the Londoners' mini-festival of Sibelius last season, the plan was to celebrate a composer who had long been considered second-tier and out-of-date. The series had the title "The Glory of Britain." But there was a bit of hedging: one work on each program was by Beethoven. The real glory was the London Symphony, under Colin Davis's direction. Davis sometimes holds the music back and underlines it too heavily, but the force of his musicianship is never in doubt. The orchestra sounded magnificent. The warm unanimity of the violins in long runs of Elgar's "Introduction and Allegro for Strings" came as a shock in the harsh cavern of Avery Fisher Hall. In Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, Emanuel Ax played off that warmth to create a brilliant, bold, high-contrast performance.

Along with the "Introduction and Allegro," the Elgar pieces I heard were the First Symphony and the Cello Concerto (with Steven Isserlis as soloist). I've also been listening, on CD, to Anthony Payne's reconstruction of the Third Symphony, which appears on the excellent English new-music label NMC. Elgar's smaller pieces always seem to me more successful than the bigger ones. He was a genius at writing marches, hymnal ditties, and wistful salon pieces (like "Sospiri" and "Elegy"). The "Enigma Variations," a sequence of character sketches, is topnotch entertainment. The "Introduction and Allegro" finds a perfect balance between energy and elegy, never ceasing to scamper back and forth between the two. But when Elgar builds large symphony and concerto structures, uncertainty creeps in. The mammoth treatment tells us that the composer believes his material to be sublime, and it does sound sublime, at moments. To paraphrase Immanuel Kant—or was it Barney Frank?—what we have here is weightiness in search of weight.

Elgar's themes have catchy midsections, full of dreaming suspensions and dying falls, but they have no real beginning or end. They slouch eternally down, like a great general seated on a too comfortable sofa. When I try to whistle the main theme of the "Enigma Variations," I can never remember how to finish it, and always find myself back at the beginning. The core theme of the First Symphony, which is modelled on "Parsifal," has the headlong momentum of a Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloon. The symphony catches my interest when it seems to grow infuriated with its insistently ambulatory material: every time the theme returns, the orchestration around it gets more bizarre, until the brass let out syncopated shrieks and the woodwinds try to whistle something else. The music exhibits self-loathing for its imperial sloth. This is an astonishing feat of psychological complexity, but not an entertaining one.

The centerpiece of the first London Symphony program was the Cello Concerto, the last major work that Elgar completed. Isserlis played it beautifully, if a little vaguely. "Hilary and Jackie" has created a fad for this most aggressively meditative of concertos: the great English cellist Jacqueline du Pré—the Jackie of the title—made a specialty of it, and the Lincoln Center Tower Records was picked clean of her classic EMI recording last week. (I haven't seen the movie, which seems to be another "Shine" scenario in which classical music is the road to madness.) In deference to the affection that others hold for the Cello Concerto—its noble resignation and false cadences leave me drowsy—I'll pass straight on to the Third Symphony, which Elgar began sketching in his last years, and which shows him returning to the strange furies of the First Symphony. Anthony Payne has ingeniously pulled together piles of sketches, keeping an Elgarian tone and imposing some classical clarity. This may be the first instance in which a composer's final thoughts were better left unfinished so that someone else could finish them.

KORNGOLD has his mannerisms, too. He begins many pieces with an upward-bounding seventh, which puts me in mind of a puppy jumping up to bite a stick. That gesture appeared everywhere in the Chamber Music Society's Korngold *Abend*, the first of three concerts centered on



Korngold in 1918 (left); Elgar (above) caricatured by Edmond X. Kapp: Sacher torte versus sherry trifle.

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Anne Sofie von Otter, the coolly ravishing Swedish mezzo. (The other programs looked at rarities from France and Scandinavia.) What saves this music from self-parody is its easy breathing, its conversational flow, even when it isn't saying much. Almost by accident, Korngold sometimes ends up saying rather visionary things. His Opus 18 songs, with their free-form chord progressions and near-cluster dissonances, come perilously close to early Messiaen—particularly to the Preludes for Piano. And why not? Only if you divide twentieth-century music into arbitrary camps does something like a Korngold-Messiaen connection become improbable. The common link is Richard Strauss, whom Korngold imitated strenuously and whom Messiaen once compared with Bach.

Otter sang "In meine innige Nacht," from Opus 18, with a smoldering passion that doesn't always come through in her invariably note-perfect performances; I wish she had sung the whole cycle, as she does on a 1994 Deutsche Grammophon disk. The concert supported a sumptuous new DG set, "Rendezvous with Korngold," in which various songs, early and late—including the seductively sweet "Shakespeare Songs," from the Hollywood period—appear alongside two chamber works: the Piano Quintet and the Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left Hand. Bengt Forsberg, at the piano, led a group of Scandinavian string players in bright, wild readings. Either of the chamber works would have been a treat, but both at once was too much: I left feeling stuffed. Listening to the CDs, you can space out your helpings of Korngold and avoid the musical equivalent of an ice-cream headache. And if that big, thumping theme at the end of the Suite reminds you of a Spielberg movie, don't blame Korngold: John Williams borrowed it for "E.T." ♦

DEPT. OF FULL DISCLOSURE

[*From the Chronicle of Higher Education's Academe Today*]

There are no news bulletins from The Chronicle of Higher Education for Thursday, August 20, because, as far as we can determine, nothing of note happened yesterday in academe.

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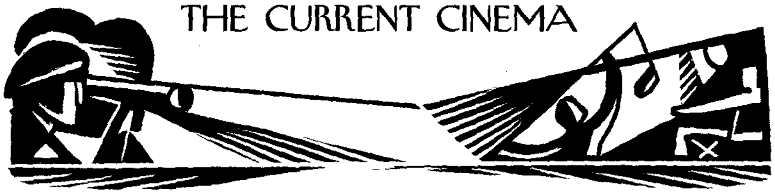


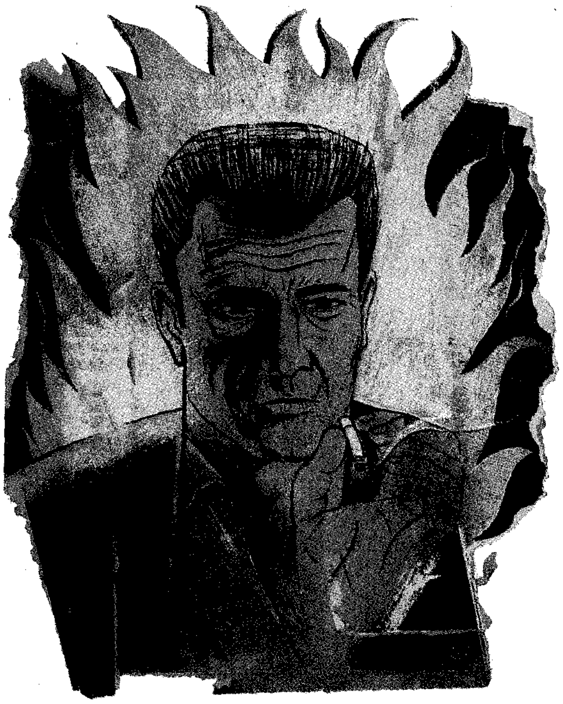
THE DEAD ZONE

Revisiting the land of "Point Blank."

BY ANTHONY LANE

IN Brian Helgeland's "Payback," Mel Gibson plays a man who is known simply as Porter. This does not mean that you should ask him to carry your luggage at railroad stations. He might well *steal* your luggage, and break your nose for good measure, but try not to take it personally. Porter, as the film is at constant pains to remind us, is a tough cookie, and he will not crumble. He was cheated of seventy thousand bucks by his double-crossing wife, Lynn (Deborah Kara Unger), and his criminal associate, Val (Gregg Henry), and now he wants the money back. The good news is that Lynn put a couple of bullets in him, and that both she and Val believe Porter to be dead; this always gives a fellow the advantage of surprise. The bad news is that his cash is not quite ready for collection. For one thing, it belongs to a bunch of Chinese gangsters, from whom Porter removed it by force in the first place; for another, Val gave it to the Outfit, and the Outfit wants to keep it.

Who, or what, you might ask, is the Outfit? Ah, there you have me. It is also known as the Syndicate, and it appears to run the whole of Chicago, despite spending most of its time sitting in hotels making phone calls. The city is never named, but it's easily recognized, and, as a moviegoer, you feel sorry for the place; it's been seventy years since Capone was arrested for diddling his taxes, but Hollywood still operates on the threadbare assumption that Chicago must, by definition, be in somebody's pocket. And so a roster of senior actors—a wrinkly Kris Kristofferson, an uncredited James Coburn, and a set of enormous teeth in a good suit which I took to be William Devane—is trotted out to apply the impression of strong and secretive power. The director of photography, Ericson Core, and the production designer, Richard Hoover, are also recruited to the cause. All the buildings and interiors, whether sleek or shabby, feel like period pieces: Deco dreck, leftovers from the twenties and thirties, with the lights turned low and the color drained away like blood. We even get voice-overs to match, all of them delivered in Gibson's slightly unconvincing American growl: "Old habits die hard, I guess. If you don't kick 'em, they kick you." "Why pour salt on old wounds? I guess I had a soft spot for her." This is tragic stuff, the kind of thing that gets writers



"Payback" wants Mel Gibson to look mean, but, above all, it wants to make him look good.

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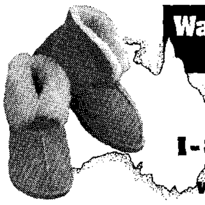

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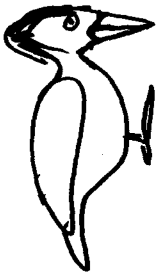
banned for life from Raymond Chandler-imitation contests. The director, Brian Helgeland, should presumably take the blame, since he himself wrote the original screenplay; on the other hand, he was partly responsible for the astringent dialogue of "L.A. Confidential," so what's going on here? As Porter would say, I smell something fishy, and it's not fish.

If rumor is right, the "Payback" that people will be watching in the coming weeks is not the "Payback" that Helgeland delivered. Gibson failed to warm to a rough cut, and, according to an article by John Horn in last month's *Premiere*, "the star brought in a new writer and a new director to reshoot up to 30 percent of the film." The new writer was Terry Hayes, who now shares a screenplay credit with Helgeland; the new director remains anonymous, though I suspect it may be someone named Mel Gibson. It's hardly worth getting indignant over this territorial scrapping, which has been a feature of the Hollywood power game since stars were born; the point is that it seldom results in anything but a mess, and in the case of "Payback" the chief victim is tone. We get grit and gore, we get dandy comic turns (the best of them from David Paymer, in a plaid jacket), and we get careless camp mayhem—personified by Pearl (Lucy Alexis Liu), a Chinese sado-hooker who goes to bed richly caparisoned in leather and steel, like a horse at Camelot. The rest of the film is so dour that it seems rattled by her prancing presence, and, like the base Indian, it blows Pearl away.



In other words, "Payback" proves that noir is less amenable than it seems; you can't just hook up to it and hope for the best. One option, which at least has the virtue of honesty, is the parodic; witness last year's "Wild Things," which found consistent pleasure in excess. "Payback" is equally gruesome—Gibson is said to have commissioned the footage, if that is the right word, in which his toes get whacked with a sledgehammer—but it has no clue as to whether Porter's purpose is worthy of serious respect, and, as the end credits rolled, the audience seemed listless and lightly stunned. Nobody had come expecting innocent pleasures, but it was tough to derive any sort of pleasure from a film that handed out such thudding and prehistoric violence to women, even when, like the estimable Pearl, they gave as good as they got. David Paymer describes Porter as "a real Cro-Magnon kind of guy," and Maria Bello, playing yet another prostitute, calls him "the strongest man I ever met." The whole film lunges and lashes like someone who desperately wants to be thought tough; it tries to keep pace with the savagery of its hero instead of standing back and observing his case.

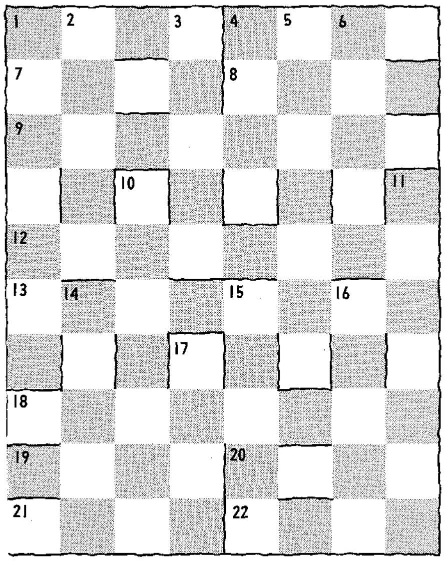
"Payback" was adapted from Richard Stark's 1962 novel "The Hunter," which also served as the basis for John Boorman's masterpiece of 1967, "Point Blank." In that picture, Lee Marvin played Walker, the prototype for Gibson's Porter, and, boy, did he walk. The biggest thrill was his clipped and clanging march straight at the camera, and his coolest move was to wait in an underground garage while someone shot at him and then, instead of dodging like a maniac, step gracefully behind a pillar. Marvin was never less than frightening, and that includes his attempt to sing in "Paint Your Wagon," but the violence that he inflicted—only a fraction of what he threatened to inflict, which was part of the fright—was the opposite of gratuitous. It wasn't a joke, and it wasn't a nervous reaction; it wasn't even particularly bloody, and his most unfortunate victim in "Point Blank" is not a person but a car. His rage is terrible, as if all the pressures of America had seethed to the surface, but until the instant of eruption his bearing is erect and proper, like an American gentleman's. Contrast that tension with "Payback" and you will see artistic degradation in full spate. Helgeland—or whoever made this movie—wants to make Mel Gibson look mean and dirty, but, above all, he wants to make him look good, whereas Boorman wanted to lock us into Walker's world and turn the key. You left "Point Blank" wondering whether Brutalism was merely a style of architecture, and how far the hard planes of Marvin's face, let alone his soul, had been shaped by his environment; the faux-grim designs of "Payback," by comparison, seem lazily tacked on. The real giveaway is the fact that no less than *four* of Helgeland's characters—Porter, Lynn, a drug-dealing punk, and a Chinese hoodlum—sport distinctive tattoos. Now that's what I call scary.

The new Iranian picture "Children of Heaven" is about a pair of shoes. No, I take that back; it is about two pairs of shoes. One pair belongs to the young Zahra (Bahare Sediqi) and gets lost when her elder brother, Ali (Amir Farrokh Hashemian), takes them to be mended. The other is an ideal—the pair of sneakers that Ali hopes to win for his sister, in a long-distance race, by way of recompense. The catch, and a lovely detail, is that he has to come in *third;* the grander prizes are no use. All this must be accomplished without the knowledge of their father (Amir Naji), who is poor and fitfully employed, and who would beat Ali if he learned about the shoes. As the race approached its slow-motion climax, I began to feel like a studio honcho in "The Player," receiving an unusual pitch: "O.K., we're talking 'Bicycle Thief' meets 'Chariots of Fire.' Great crossover potential."

There is crossover here, but of a peculiar sort. One so prays for foreign movies to introduce not just unfamiliar settings but a new visual grammar that it is a shock to find oneself being snagged by the oldest tricks in the book. Ali's predicament is beautifully observed, but whenever it nears a crisis point, his chin starts to wobble and the tears trickle down; Chaplin would have thought this a bit rich for Jackie Coogan in 1921, and the music makes you want to ask what the Farsi is for schmaltz. What pulls the picture beyond the cute is the glimpses of Iranian life—literal glimpses, often, as the camera peers down the high-walled alleys of Teheran. Zahra, the more interesting of the children, hangs out in the playground like any American kid, but then the little girls have to line up and shout "Obedience to the Leader!," which is not really Bill Clinton's style. As in other recent Iranian movies, this bewildering blend of fear and kindliness, of small favors and more taxing loyalties, seems like an ideal breeding ground for fables and fictions; it will be good to see the director, Majid Majidi, put away childish things and step into larger shoes. ♦

8 x 10 CRYPTIC

NO. 77 BY MIKE SHENK



ACROSS

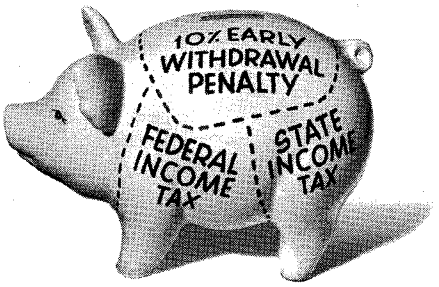
1 Grouchy person right in front of a truck (4)
4 Bit of sampling in hip-hop music—it can be grating (4)
7 The woman's ring champion (4)
8 Returned note to choir singer (4)
9 Russian flying group returning to the front in bunches (8)
12 Tourist hat's orange in the middle. . . . Really? (2,4,2)
13 Fancy collar clutched by tense movie director (8)
18 French painter's spouse maintaining spunky quality (8)
19 Commercial cue starting late for two singers (1,3)
20 Rial is foreign coin (4)
21 Reportedly chains bobcat (4)
22 When turned, spigots made sputtering sounds (4)

DOWN

1 Money for the needy raised cheer in urban area (7)
2 Rushes Cincinnati ballplayers, getting error (5)
3 The two of them eating nothing in diner area (5)
4 Run toward the back while sailing river vessel (4)
5 Left foremost of sluggers in shrine for the best players (3-4)
6 Puts away last of equipment in plants (5)
10 Immobilizing weapon acutely hurt United Nations (4,3)
11 Hates to put in another order—it's an uncomfortable position to be in (3,4)
14 Prepared singer Helen for the audience (5)
15 Knocks down failing artist's paints (5)
16 Extreme part of adult rating (5)
17 Prehistoric beast in Italy three times (1,3)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 76 appears on page 89. The last clue of puzzle No. 76, 17 Down, was inadvertently dropped. The clue is: Discussed escape from pest (4). We regret the error.



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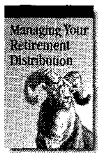

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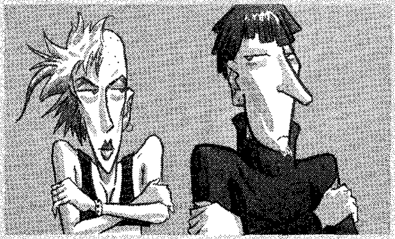
THE BACK PAGE

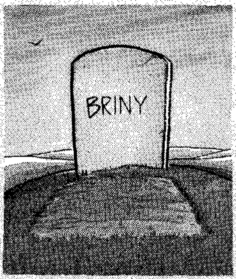
BY PAUL RUDNICK & HARRY BLISS

THE NEW YORK TIMES **DIVORCES** *SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1999*



Stare and Blick Feld

Dance/fusion artist Stare and her husband, composer Blick Feld, have separated, citing a lull in publicity. The couple, whose Tribeca loft and East Hampton performance laboratory were featured in shelter publications worldwide, had noted a decrease in their funding to create silent operas at BAM and a fall-off in letters attacking them as spoiled poseurs in the Sunday *Times*. Stare will retain custody of her intensity and mesmerizing stillness, while Mr. Feld will share ownership of both his notes. The couple's three press agents and house critic have been sold to a wealthy Venezuelan couple, who have also purchased a videotape of Stare's twelve-hour exploration of her neck, entitled, "If I Were German You'd Care."



Shreve and Baste Shipley-Towle

Investment bankers Shreve and Baste Shipley-Towle were divorced today, although their genders remain unclear. The couple attribute the end of their marriage to a mutual, relentless workload and the fact that they had been previously married to each other but didn't remember. Shreve is the offspring of Belt and Nimsy Shipley, of Pendulous, Connecticut, and Baste is the scion of Whelp and Stit Towle of Bluster, Massachusetts. The couple's Park Avenue triplex will remain arid, and their golden Lab, Briny, has done the right thing and leaped to his death. The couple have no fluids.

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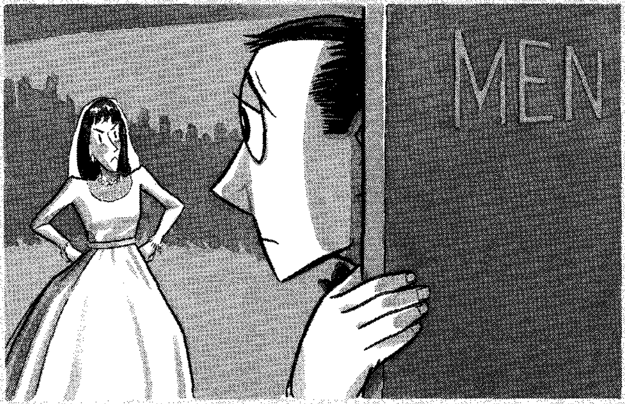
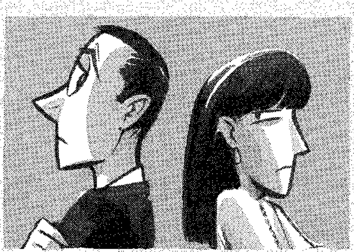


VOWS

Melissa Krell-Bauerman and Mark David Bauerman

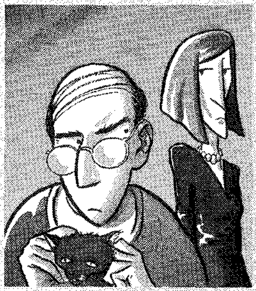


MELISSA KRELL-BAUERMAN and Mark David Bauerman were divorced on Monday following a marriage that lasted just under fifteen minutes. The bride, a junior V.P. with a firm that knocks off Donna Karan eyewear, cited mental anguish and desertion in her suit against the groom, a plastic surgeon specializing in toe reductions. Melissa claimed that her agony began at the reception: "We were on the receiving line, and Mark squeezed my waist and told me I'd never looked more beautiful, and it hit me that he'd probably said the exact same thing to his first wife, Janice, at their reception, even though she had no business wearing white satin with those hips. As I turned to confront him, he vanished, returning three endless minutes later from, he claimed, the men's room. I knew that Mark's lies and his tiny bladder had made our relationship into a cold, empty thing, and that I'd be better off as a grim, aging divorcée wearing full makeup in my spinning class." In her settlement, Melissa received every wedding gift that created a bread, waffle, or stuffed pita, along with both honeymoon tickets to the Bellagio Resort and Casino, in Las Vegas, where she met a wonderful proctologist while they were both admiring the Matisse over the blackjack table.

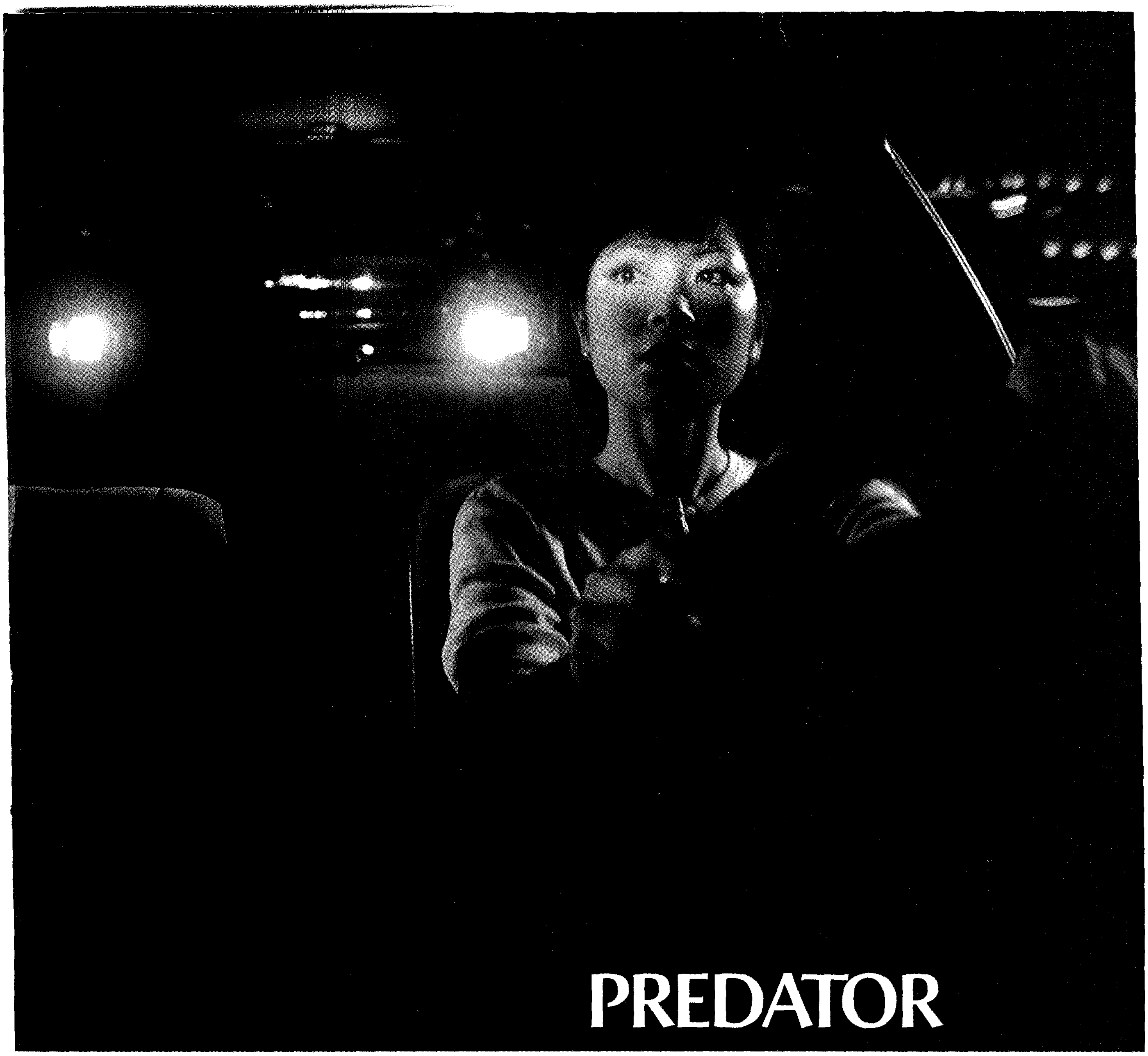
Senator Worth Mingeley and Barbara Mingeley

Senator Worth Mingeley and his wife, Barbara, have divorced, following the Senator's confession, on the Senate floor, that he had committed adultery more than three thousand times, although, as he noted, many of the she-males were return visits. The couple have three grown sons, all with political aspirations and lusty, teasing nannies, and Mrs. Mingeley hopes to continue her work as an advocate for the shapeless.

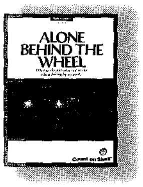
Harris Beloit and Rebecca Sylvan



Novelist and emotional sadist Harris Beloit and poetess, essayist, and doormat Rebecca Sylvan finalized their divorce late last week, following months of legal wrangling over subsidiary rights to the couple's marital history. Harris ultimately received permission to lightly fictionalize and cruelly caricature Rebecca's breathy speech patterns, her small breasts, and her tendency to sleep with any man resembling her father, Pulitzer Prize-winning Civil War historian Pug Matson, whose chilly alcoholism and tormented bisexuality Rebecca has mined in her last eight memoirs. In the settlement, Rebecca won the right to pen an iambic cycle comparing Harris to Satan, along with an as-told-to autobiography covering Harris's affairs with her best friend, her daughter from a previous marriage, and her cat, who is represented by Andrew Wylie.



How to avoid being the prey.



You're being followed. Even after you turn, he's close behind. You're frightened. What do you do? Don't go home. You don't want to lead him to your loved ones. Instead, drive to a well-lighted place where there are lots of people. A store, service station, hospital or police station. Once there, make a scene. Lean on the horn; flash your lights. Draw attention. For more information about what to do when you're driving by yourself, get Alone Behind the Wheel, free from Shell. Pick one up at a station, visit us on the web at www.countonshell.com, or call 1-800-376-0200.

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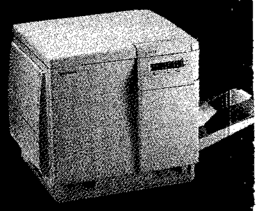

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